Machiavelli, Leonardo, and the Science of Power

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Introduction

Indeed, it is evident that the philosophy of nature is indispensable.

Leo Strauss[1]

What is the difference between right and wrong? Can we know anything about justice and morality in the sense that we know truths in physics or chemistry? Because modern science seems to create a gulf between facts and values, these perennial questions have become particularly acute.

We live in a time marked by a lack of consensus on moral or legal principles. "Cultural diversity" has come to symbolize not merely respect for others, but an inability to explain why some forms of behavior are superior to others. "Just Do It"—a popular motto on T-shirts in some places—has become the tacit standard of many in business, politics, law, and everyday life. For the terrorist as for the literary deconstructionist, commitment is the measure of right and wrong.

Most of us, of course, continue to respect moral standards and legal obligations. But the reasons for what we do seem unclear. For every practical issue, politicians and preachers proclaim diametrically opposed views with equal fervor. Is it a question of abortion? For some, the answer is a fetus's "right to life"; for others, it is a woman's "right to choose." Should we pay taxes?

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For some, governmental activity is always inherently suspect and "no new taxes" an almost sacred refrain; for others, social obligation extends to a guarantee of equal opportunity if not equal success to all.

Since antiquity, such issues have been the focus of serious thought about human nature and society. In private life, the ordinary person confronts similar issues, often wondering why social norms and laws exist. Little wonder that theologians and political philosophers have offered diverse answers to the questions asked by every growing child, not to mention every intelligent citizen.

In the Western tradition, the concept of human nature has generally been central to the religious doctrines and secular theories that explain society, law, and morality. The origins and character of our species have also been a matter of scientific study since the ancient Greeks. As a result, issues of moral and political thought touch on the findings of natural science as well as on philosophic theories and religious doctrines.

Since Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1858, the need to relate questions of human nature and society to the natural sciences has become even more obvious. This century has seen unparalleled advances in the scientific understanding of evolution and human biology: we know more today about our species' nature than ever before. Paradoxically, however, this century has also seen an unparalleled division between the study of nature and the study of morality, law, and politics.

My book is part of a growing concern to respond to this situation. Over the last twenty years, along with other scholars, I have suggested a return to the naturalistic tradition of Western thought, in which a scientific study of human life is directly relevant to questions of morality and law.

In my own teaching, research, and publication I have tried to integrate evolutionary biology, political psychology, political philosophy, law, and human ethology. The organization of the present book, while unorthodox, thus reflects an effort to bring

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together two traditions that have drifted apart over the last century.

To explore the issues of political philosophy as they have been articulated in the past, I set out to focus on a single thinker—Niccolò Machiavelli. This great and subtle Florentine is often said to have founded a modern "scientific" study of human affairs. To assess the *truth* of Machiavelli's theories, however, we must consider what is known, today, about hominid evolution and the natural factors influencing social behavior. This procedure is particularly necessary now that Darwinian evolutionary theory is generally accepted within the scientific community as the explanation of human origins.

To compare Machiavelli's theories with scientific findings, it is first necessary to state his theories accurately. This turns out to be more difficult than might first appear. Scholars have proposed very different interpretations of *The Prince, Discourses on Titus Livy*, and other works by Machiavelli. It is, therefore, necessary to read the texts carefully in order to define Machiavelli's theory of human nature before we can test it against the latest scientific research. In so doing, I realized that scholars have ignored some critical evidence.

At the outset of *The Prince*, Machiavelli tells us that his knowledge is based on his "long experience of modern things" as well as "continuous reading of ancient ones." When reading and interpreting his work, particular attention therefore needs to be given to Machiavelli's political career. Machiavelli held high office in the Florentine Republic from 1498 until the overthrow of Piero Soderini's regime in 1512. I now believe that his thought was particularly shaped by an event in this career: Machiavelli's meeting, during his mission to the court of Cesare Borgia in 1502, with Leonardo da Vinci (who at that time was serving as Borgia's architect and military engineer).

After giving the Covey Lectures on which this book is based, I discovered, almost by accident, that the lives of Machiavelli and Leonardo intersected. Although Leonardo's biographers and

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many art historians believe they became close friends in 1502, the extent of their contacts has been questioned by intellectual historians. Most political theorists have been unaware that Machiavelli's thought might have been influenced by the most extraordinary artist, engineer, and scientific innovator of the Renaissance. When I came across the statement that they were friends (while looking at a book on Leonardo at the Chicago Art Institute bookshop), I did not expect how difficult it would be to establish the truth of the story.

Neither Machiavelli nor Leonardo mentions the other by name in writings or letters that have survived; this is not conclusive, however, since both were legendary for their elusiveness or deviousness. Leonardo's *Notebooks* contain amazing things—including passages that seemingly relate to Machiavelli's works—but no conclusive evidence. Machiavelli's secondary works, including poems written before *The Prince* as well as *The Art of War*, provide little more than tantalizing hints. Only after completing an account pieced together from secondary sources did I discover that many relevant documents, although published in Italian, have never been translated into English or analyzed with adequate care by Machiavelli's biographers.

As Second Chancellor of the Florentine Signoria and Secretary to the Committee known as the Ten of War, Machiavelli wrote extensive letters and memoranda that are still in the Florentine archives. His dispatches from the court of Cesare Borgia in 1502–1503, the so-called *Legations to Valentino*, refer to conversations with an unnamed "friend" or "first secretary" of Cesare.

This purely circumstantial evidence was immeasurably strengthened by the discovery of additional documents reproduced below. Letters and archival materials prove that between 1503 and 1506, Machiavelli's responsibilities included four projects on which Leonardo da Vinci was involved. One of these, an attempt to divert the Arno River during the siege of Pisa, is especially important: a letter from the field proves that

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Leonardo visited the site on 23 July 1503 and played a role in the adoption of the project (Appendix I.2). Machiavelli's dispatches from Florence demonstrate that he took an active role in supervising the attempted diversion (Appendix I.4). As I will show, this experience had a lasting impact on Machiavelli, whose writings echo views of science, warfare, and technology found only in Leonardo's *Notebooks*. This influence is of the greatest importance because Leonardo himself had worked out visionary plans for a political system that foreshadowed modern industrial societies.

Chapter one introduces the argument by setting forth the historical evidence concerning the relationship between Leonardo da Vinci and Machiavelli. I trace the careers of Leonardo and Machiavelli, with particular emphasis on the period between 1502 and 1508 when they were most likely to have met and talked with each other. While many points remain uncertain and we cannot be sure that their acquaintance ever constituted close friendship, the documents establish that Machiavelli knew Leonardo to some degree.[2] As a result, no comprehensive account of Machiavelli's political thought can ignore his political experiences between 1500 and 1512.

Based on this historical account, the next two chapters set forth an interpretation of Machiavelli's political teaching that is not shared by all commentators and scholars. When the Florentine Republic fell in 1512, Machiavelli was arrested and tortured on charges of conspiring against the new Medici rulers. These circumstances, too often neglected when reading and interpreting *The Prince*, confirm the old view that Machiavelli was an exceptionally deceptive writer who often "hid" his republican principles.

Chapter two is devoted to the problem of how to read Machiavelli's *Prince*. In it, I briefly describe Machiavelli's political career and the context in which he wrote, contrast *The Prince* with the *Discourses on Titus Livy*, and examine his own statements of his "intention." Both correspondence and

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published works confirm the view that he wrote in what he himself called a "covert" manner. To avoid the criticism that such an interpretation is impossible to prove, I will suggest specific criteria for discovering implicit meanings in a theoretical text, and show that Machiavelli's writings meet these standards of evidence.

The substance of Machiavelli's political philosophy is summarized in chapter three. Focusing on a careful reading of *The Prince*, I explain why he repeatedly suggested that he had found a "new way" of thinking about human life, abandoning otherworldly piety and transforming ancient political philosophy in the light of the needs of political practice. But while challenging both pagan Greek rationalism and Christian faith, Machiavelli somehow preserves and builds on both traditions.

Machiavelli's "new way" can properly claim to open the possibility of what came to be called modern thought and politics. He bases political and moral principles on a secular or pagan view of human nature, substituting observation of the world for biblical revelation as the means to knowledge. But he does not simply go back to the conception of human virtue and morality that Western tradition had derived from philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Instead, Machiavelli's understanding is also shaped by a reflection on the primacy of political practice and an awareness of the new scientific perspective explored by Leonardo da Vinci.

The result is a this-worldly view of history, opening the hope that events can be partly controlled or shaped by human intelligence, art, and choice. Our world of science and technology seems but a development of this perspective, according to which humans can create new things just as, in *Genesis*, Yahweh created the heavens, the earth, and all living things.

In the Bible, Moses and the Israelites are saved by God's parting of the Red Sea. As a Florentine political official, in 1503–1504 Machiavelli consulted Leonardo on the engineering

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plans for diverting the Arno River to defeat Pisa; this experience, and Leonardo's writings, suggest that Machiavelli had both theoretical and practical reasons to think that human science and technology could be used to achieve ends once sought only by prayer. Although Machiavelli's experience of working with Leonardo could have indicated such a transformation of values would be possible, it also revealed its dangers if science and technology were not controlled by political prudence.

A superficial reading of *The Prince* not only obscures these deeper insights, but even confuses Machiavelli's judgments in political matters. By considering the text carefully and relating it to the *Discourses on Titus Livy*, it will become evident that Machiavelli's principles lead to an emphasis on a government of "law" primarily dependent on the "people" and backed by "force." In a profound sense, he laid the foundation of modern "constitutional" or "democratic" political regimes. If so, we are entitled to ask whether Machiavelli's science of power is valid in the light of contemporary natural science.

Because Machiavelli professed to base his political understanding on the "effectual truth of the thing" and claimed that successful leaders must "use" both the "beast" and the "man," it is especially appropriate to confront his remarks about human nature with the scientific understanding of our species' evolution and biology. The nature of animal social behavior is now a subject of extensive study, both in field and laboratory research. A reconsideration of Machiavelli's theories in the light of these studies is especially appropriate because biologists now describe the capacity for deception and social manipulation in monkeys and apes as "Machiavellian intelligence." The next three chapters therefore survey the findings of the life sciences as they relate to the emergence of social cooperation, law, and political leadership in human affairs.

Chapter four, "Using the Beast: Animal Dominance and Human Leadership," begins from a famous passage in chapter

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eighteen of *The Prince*. There, Machiavelli distinguishes between the "nature" of "man" and "beast," and counsels the leader—the individual Machiavelli calls "the prince" (*il principe*)—to "pick" the "lion" and the "fox" to control the "wolves." What does Machiavelli mean when using the "lion," the "fox," and the "wolves" as symbols of the basic social and political problems facing humans?[3] What do we know about animal social behavior, and how does it relate to problems of leadership and social cooperation in our own species? Clearly we cannot know the natural foundations of society without understanding the origins of the social behavior exhibited by lions, foxes, and wolves—not to mention birds, bees, and whales.[4]

Chapter five turns to the specifically human institution of governments and the centralized state. Machiavelli is famed not only for his concept of the prince, but for an emphasis on "the state" (*lo stato*). Knowing the roots of dominance and status among animals does not resolve the question of how centralized governments arise in human affairs.[5] To assess Machiavelli's theory of the state, it is necessary to reconsider the assumption of human selfishness in the philosophic tradition from the Greek Sophists to modern social contract theories, relating the origin of government to contemporary models in rational choice or game theory as well as evolutionary biology.[6]

Chapter six considers Machiavelli's view of the relations between leaders and led in the light of observational studies of animal social behavior, with emphasis on the role of television in contemporary Western societies. The Machiavellian "economy of power," resting on the triad of love, hate, and fear, corresponds to the essential components in the behavioral repertoire of primates; facial displays of the emotions and social signals corresponding to these three motives play a central role in human leadership. An examination of the average citizen's emotions and judgments when watching leaders reveals the central role of the *mode of communication* between the leaders

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and led, and leads to a surprising reconsideration of Machiavelli as political thinker.

In effect, over the last two centuries Machiavelli has had a popular reputation as a teacher of evil.[7] At a time when political life was conceptualized in terms of individual "rights," Machiavelli seemed somewhat anachronistic. Even for those who view him as a republican, Machiavelli's concerns are often reduced to the narrow question of how far effective leaders need to violate the social norms of an established, stable society.

By focusing on the mode of communication between leaders and citizens, we gain a better idea of the reasons for these interpretations of Machiavelli. The constitutional regimes characteristic of modernity, particularly after the revolutions of the late eighteenth century in the United States and France, relied on the newspapers as the essential mode of political communication; the result was the emergence of the political party, an institution not predicted by Machiavelli. In a political universe dominated by political discourse based on printing Machiavelli's teaching seemed to many obsolete.

Television, by profoundly changing the mode of communication, has recreated—on the larger scale of the nation-state—many of the issues characteristic of the Renaissance cities of Italy. In returning to what appears to be a more direct or unmediated interaction between leaders and led, television seems to have returned us to the era of Machiavellian politics.

In chapter seven, I reconsider the extent to which Machiavelli's thought can clarify contemporary life. To understand modernity and its crisis, or even to ascertain the extent to which Machiavelli can be called a modern, it is necessary to define the central attribute of our epoch. This characteristic can be found, I argue, in the integration of scientific theory, technological innovation, commerce, industry, and politics. Whereas theory and practice were divorced, albeit for different reasons, in antiquity and the Middle Ages, after the Renaissance there came to be a close reciprocal relationship

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between scientific theories and technological or social practice.

Chapter seven then summarizes the way Leonardo da Vinci and Machiavelli contributed to this specifically modern view of science, technology, and politics. I show that Leonardo's life and work were focused on radical innovations, everywhere challenging the distinction between theory and practice inherited from the past. In domains as diverse as painting, mathematics, physics, hydraulics, military engineering, architecture, and comparative anatomy, Leonardo introduced concepts and practices often centuries before they were fully realized in the modern West. More to the point, Leonardo extended these concepts to the study of human nature, society, and law, foreseeing a modern community based on private property and scientific technology.

These developments help explain why Machiavelli would have been influenced by his encounter with Leonardo. Whether the two men were once close friends or merely contemporaries whose direct contact was limited to consultation on official projects, their work can be said to symbolize the origins of modernity. To cite but one example, both Leonardo and Machiavelli saw how artillery had changed the nature of warfare by giving a strategic advantage to the offense, ending the defensive invulnerability of the feudal castle, and requiring substantial changes in military architecture and planning. From this, as can be seen in *The Prince* and *Discourses* as well as *The Art of War*, Machiavelli saw the necessity for a new political form, which he called "the state" (*lo stato*), based on a citizen army, prudent leadership, and effective laws.

Although Leonardo and Machiavelli both innovated in important ways, neither developed fully the political implications of the modern view of theory and practice. As an illustration of the further transformations that occurred to make possible our highly technological civilization, with its conquest of the globe and its never-ending revolutions of scientific theory, technology, and socio-economic change, I will show how

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Hobbes radicalized Machiavelli's view of human potentiality. Machiavelli's famous image of fortune as a river, which at one level might refer to the ill-fated project to redirect the Arno, illustrates the possibility of a partial control of human history; for Machiavelli himself, theory can never be a complete guide to practice.

Hobbes moves far beyond this by seeking a geometrical certainty in the scientific theory that is to guide practice. The consequences were not only the origins of liberalism in the concept that all men have an equal "natural right" to life and liberty, but a thoroughgoing integration of theory and practice. In place of the need for prudent legislators and leaders, Hobbes and those who follow in this tradition seek universal enlightenment. The consequences are a society of never-ending change, devoted to the myth of progress and subject to the dangers of ideological tyranny and technological disaster.

My conclusion assesses the continued value of Machiavelli's perspective. The contemporary predicament could be described as an impossibility either to continue the modern quest for a limitless conquest of nature or to return to the earlier perspectives of classical antiquity and medieval Christianity. The civilization of the West has, since the sixteenth century, been based on a creative tension between a modern science of technological power, ancient traditions of reasoned justice, and religious beliefs in the limitations of human activity. Since Bacon spoke of the "conquest of nature," we have been dedicated to using the power of science to resolve social conflict. In assessing the depth of the contemporary crisis, I suggest it may be beneficial to reconsider Machiavelli's science of power as a means of integrating the wisdom of the ancients with the effectual realities of the present.

In reassessing the contemporary condition in the light of Machiavelli's contribution to modernity, I would be failing in my duties should I neglect to thank Loyola University of Chicago for providing the occasion for the lectures that gave rise

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to this book. Since human institutions cannot be divorced from the individuals who animate them, I have a particular debt to the late Professor Richard Hartigan, whose invitation to present the Covey Lectures in Political Analysis was the stimulus for relating Machiavelli's thought to recent scientific studies of human nature. As one who taught and wrote wisely on the necessity for a return to the naturalistic tradition in political philosophy, Dick provided both friendship and support for those like myself who shared in the quest for rational standards of justice and law. His loss has been widely felt; it is a great sadness that he did not live to see the final fruit of the lectures he encouraged me to give.

After beginning to write this book, as I have noted, I discovered the evidence that Machiavelli worked with Leonardo da Vinci and was probably influenced by this experience. In exploring this relationship, and in countless other ways, special thanks are due my former student John T. Scott, now a scholar who often teaches his former professor. In addition to commenting critically on the drafts of this essay, John has been indefatigable in locating valuable references on the relations between Machiavelli and Leonardo, and in focusing my attention on the fundamental issues.

When the first draft of this book was almost completed, William Connell provided a model of vigorous but informed scholarly criticism of an earlier draft chapter, presenting firmly the case against the supposed friendship of Machiavelli and Leonardo. In a subsequent letter, he most generously alerted me to Denis Fachard's study of Machiavelli's assistant and friend, Biagio Buonaccorsi, published in France almost twenty years ago, as well as to John M. Najemy's recent analysis of the Machiavelli-Vettori correspondence. These works, which do much to bring Machiavelli's political career to life, were invaluable and, combined with more thorough research of my own, led me to the documents reproduced in Appendix I. At a time when anonymous reviewers all too frequently indulge in

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hasty reading and prejudiced evaluation, Professor Connell demonstrated that the best traditions of fair-minded intellectual inquiry are very much alive.

As these remarks indicate, no scholar works alone. Today more than ever, thought and reflection entail obligations to others. Among those to whom I am particularly indebted, but who should not be held responsible for my errors, are (in addition to those just mentioned): Richard Alexander, Larry Arnhart, E. Donald Elliott, Wolfgang Fikentscher, Robert Frank, Siegfried Frey, Margaret Gruter, Michael T. McGuire, Heinrich Meier, Thomas Pangle, Michael Platt, William Rodgers, Jr., Glendon Schubert, Denis G. Sullivan, Lionel Tiger, Robert Trivers, and Edward O. Wilson. Two dear friends, Allan Bloom and Henry Ehrmann, contributed greatly to my understanding but did not live to correct my most recent errors.

Last but far from least, scholars have obligations to individuals and institutions who play a critical role in the support of the endeavor of writing. This work was completed while enjoying the leisure of a Senior Faculty Fellowship from Dartmouth College. The time and resources thereby made available would, however, not have been of use without the love and support of my wife Sandy. To all these, my thanks and appreciation.

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Chapter One

Leonardo and Machiavelli

. . . come haveno più mesi fa Lionardo di ser Piero da Vinci, cittadino fiorentino, tolto a dipignere uno quadro della Sala del Consiglio grande. . . . Actum in palatio dictorum Dominorum presentibus Nicolao Domini Bernardi de Machiavellis. . . .[1]

. . . havendo in questo caso ad dire l'opinione nostra, ci piaceva più quel primo disegno che questo ultimo, perché entrando Arno per due vie, et l'una et l'altra non molto largha. . . .[2]

It is unconventional to begin a book on one thinker by describing the life of another. There is little choice, however. I will argue that Machiavelli sought to introduce a novel view of human politics, based in part on Leonardo da Vinci's innovations in science and technology. This argument forces me to establish that Leonardo's work and thought were known to Machiavelli. Such a task is all the more imperative because, while art historians have often spoken of their friendship, students of political theory and intellectual history have rarely even mentioned they were contemporaries. As a result, most scholars are surprised to discover that a relationship between Machiavelli and Leonardo was even possible.

Did Machiavelli know Leonardo? Although it may at first seem a trivial historical detail, an answer to this question can illuminate our understanding of Western civilization. The modern epoch has been dominated by commerce and industry, the centralized nation-state, truly global economic and socio-political interactions, and—above all

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—a close integration of scientific theory and technical or social practice.[3] Historians of science, of art, and of technology have often discussed Leonardo da Vinci's place in the transition to this epoch.[4] Likewise, in the history of political and social thought, scholars have frequently debated the extent to which Niccolò Machiavelli was "modern."[5]

Most intellectual historians have doubted that these two Florentine contemporaries were friends or ignored the possibility entirely. There is good reason for this. There does not seem to be a single explicit reference to Machiavelli in the voluminous *Notebooks* of Leonardo.[6] Conversely, Machiavelli never discusses Leonardo in his writings—even though there would have been ample reason to do so when describing the behavior of Cesare Borgia in 1502/3, since at that time Leonardo was Cesare's chief military engineer and Machiavelli himself was Florentine emissary at Cesare's court.[7] Despite this silence, there is strong evidence that they knew each other and some reason to believe that the two may have been, at least at one time, friends. Indeed, the absence of explicit mention of Leonardo in anything written by Machiavelli (apart from the public document cited as first epigraph to this chapter) may actually reinforce the substantive importance of the contacts between them.

Students of political theory who seem unaware that Machiavelli might have known Leonardo sometimes speak at length of the similarities between them.[8] Although there are hints, parallels, and circumstantial evidence of meetings between them, critics charge that there is no solid proof of direct contact.[9] On the other hand, many distinguished scholars—including Kenneth Clark, Giorgio Santillana, and Carlo Pedretti—have spoken of the "friendship" between Leonardo and Machiavelli.[10] Even those who question whether the two were personally acquainted need to admit that the parallels noted below justify a comparison between Leonardo and Machiavelli.[11]

As I shall argue, the absence of evidence does not constitute evidence of absence: although Machiavelli does not discuss Leonardo da Vinci by name, there are plausible reasons for this fact.[12] Moreover, part of the obscurity may be due to our own prejudices: the influence of Leonardo is particularly evident in Machiavelli's discussion of military strategy and the technological transformation

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of warfare by artillery, a topic rarely examined in detail by commentators on Machiavelli's political thought.[13] Posed in the historical context, it will be clear not only that Leonardo marked a major step in the emergence of the modern view of science and technology, but that Machiavelli shared—whether through personal interaction or mere propinquity—a similar approach to human knowledge and action.

To determine whether Leonardo directly influenced Machiavelli or they are merely parallel but independent innovators, it is necessary to summarize what we know about the career of Leonardo and its intersection with that of Machiavelli. The ambiguities just noted make it prudent to formulate a "maximal" and a "minimal" interpretation of their relationship. I will therefore distinguish between the minimum agreed evidence (based on undisputed facts), and the hypothesis that Machiavelli and Leonardo became close friends during the years 1502 to 1507 (possibly followed by a break after Leonardo went to Milan and entered the service of King Louis XII of France). The truth must be somewhere between the undisputed factual evidence of contacts between them and the extrapolation of intimate friendship made by some scholars. In assessing the question, the secretive practices of both Leonardo and Machiavelli will force us to consider apparently extraneous historical events and textual passages much as a detective would sift the clues in an unsolved case.

I. The Life and Work of Leonardo

Leonardo da Vinci was born in 1452 in the village of Anchiano, near Vinci—some twenty miles from the center of Florence.[14] Because he was illegitimate—his father, Ser Piero da Vinci (a notary from a family of local gentry) having refused to marry his mother (who was of a lower class)—the young Leonardo was forced to make his own way. In 1469, while his father was living in the Palazzo del Podestà in Florence, Leonardo began an apprenticeship with the painter Verrocchio, whose prestigious workshop during this period included Botticelli, Perugino, Ghirlandaio, and Lorenzo di Credi. By 1472, Leonardo's name was listed on the register of Florentine painters.

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Four years later, along with three other young men, Leonardo was anonymously accused of sodomy, though the charge was never proven and he was ultimately acquitted.[15] From 1477 to 1482, Leonardo worked as an independent artist in Florence, receiving several major commissions (some of which, including an altarpiece for Chapel San Bernardo in the Palazzo Vecchio, were never completed); from this time are dated the portrait of *Ginevra de Benci* (1474–80; see Figure 1.1),[16] preparatory work for the *Adoration of the Magi* (1481), *St. Jerome* (c. 1481), and the first drawings of mechanical devices.

In 1482, Leonardo offered his services to Ludovico Sforza (il Moro) of Milan, having written that in addition to his abilities as sculptor and painter, he had plans for such technological innovations as bridges, devices to control water, and a variety of military innovations.[17] Leaving Florence without completing another important commission (the *Adoration of the Magi* for the Monastery of Saint Donato at Scopeto), Leonardo was to work in Milan until 1499. During these years, in addition to his paintings—of which the most notable was *The Last Supper* at Santa Marie della Grazie (1495–98)[18]—Leonardo explored radical new techniques in sculpture and other arts, wrote his treatise on painting, studied natural science, designed a variety of new weapons (Figure 1.2) as well as industrial machines (Figure 1.3), and engaged in extensive contacts with the mathematician Pacioli and other scientists and theologians at the court of Milan. While making a name for his outstanding musical ability (much of his time at court being occupied with planning and executing pageants, games, and entertainments for Sforza), Leonardo also sketched architectural plans, including a radical urban planning scheme for the city; from this period comes the remarkable map of Milan, with its combination of aerial perspectives (Figure 1.4).[19] After the fall of Ludovico and his capture by the French army, Leonardo traveled to Mantua and Venice before returning to Florence in the spring of 1500.[20]

In 1498, two years before Leonardo's return to Florence, Savonarola had been declared a heretic and burned, leading to the establishment of the Florentine Republic in which Machiavelli was named Second Chancellor and Secretary of the Committee of Ten

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(responsible for foreign policy and war).[21] In 1500, as is clear in *The Prince*, Machiavelli was on diplomatic mission to Nantes, where he met with Georges d'Amboise, minister of Louis XII and Cardinal of Rouen.[22]

In August 1502, Leonardo accepted Cesare Borgia's invitation to serve as "our most excellent and dearly beloved architect and general engineer . . . charged with inspecting the places and fortifications of our states."[23] This decision has been called "a surprising step" and a "strange decision," especially since before leaving Milan two years earlier, Leonardo had been offered such a position by Cesare and had turned it down.[24] While we do not know why Leonardo took this position, there is no question that he served in Cesare Borgia's court throughout the autumn and winter of 1502/3.

In early September 1502, Machiavelli joined Francesco Soderini, the Bishop of Volterra, on a mission to Cesare Borgia. Later that month, Francesco's brother Piero Soderini was elected Gonfalonier (head of state) of Florence for life. Machiavelli then returned to Cesare's court, where he was in attendance from October through the end of the year. As private correspondence shows, Machiavelli was close to both Soderini brothers and highly valued by others in the Signoria for the accurate "description" and "judgment" in his reports from "Duke Valentino's" court.[25]

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Figure 1.1. Leonardo da Vinci, *Ginevra de Benci* (c. 1476), oil on wood panel, 15 1/4 × 14 1/2 inches (38.8 × 36.7 cm). Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund).

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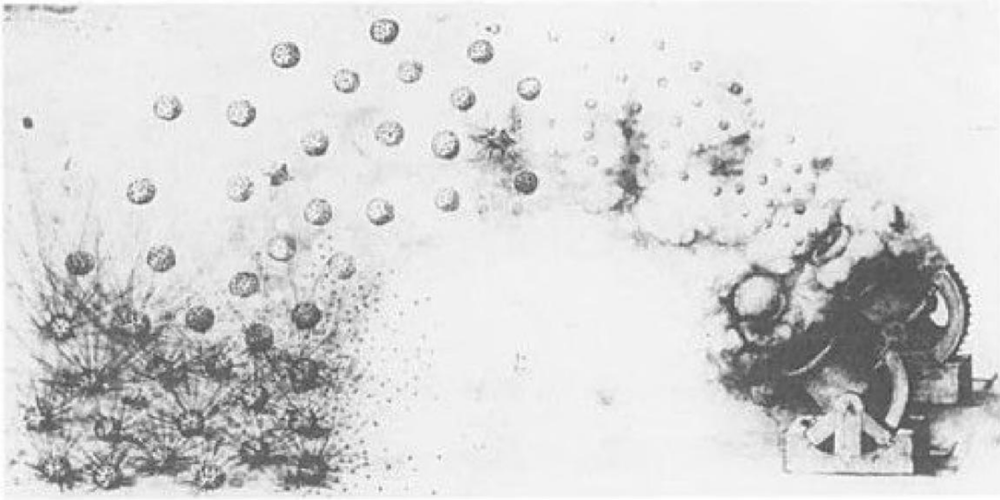

Figure 1.2. Leonardo da Vinci, Design for a Shrapnel-firing Cannon. Codex Atlanticus, folio 9, verso a. Courtesy of Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana. "This huge mortar looks much like the powerful new cannon used in the American Civil War. . . . The shrapnel are filled with powder and pocked with holes so that upon impact they will explode and scatter deadly fragments. Leonardo describes the shrapnel shell, in his Manuscript B, as 'the most deadly machine that exists . . . the ball in the center bursts and scatters the others which fire in such time as is needed to say an Ave Maria.' Leonardo hated war, calling it 'beastly madness.' Even in this, he seems to anticipate many scientists of the 20th century—abhorring war and yet putting his great genius into its employ" (Birn Dibner, "Machines and Weaponry," in Reti, *Unknown Leonardo*, 188–189).

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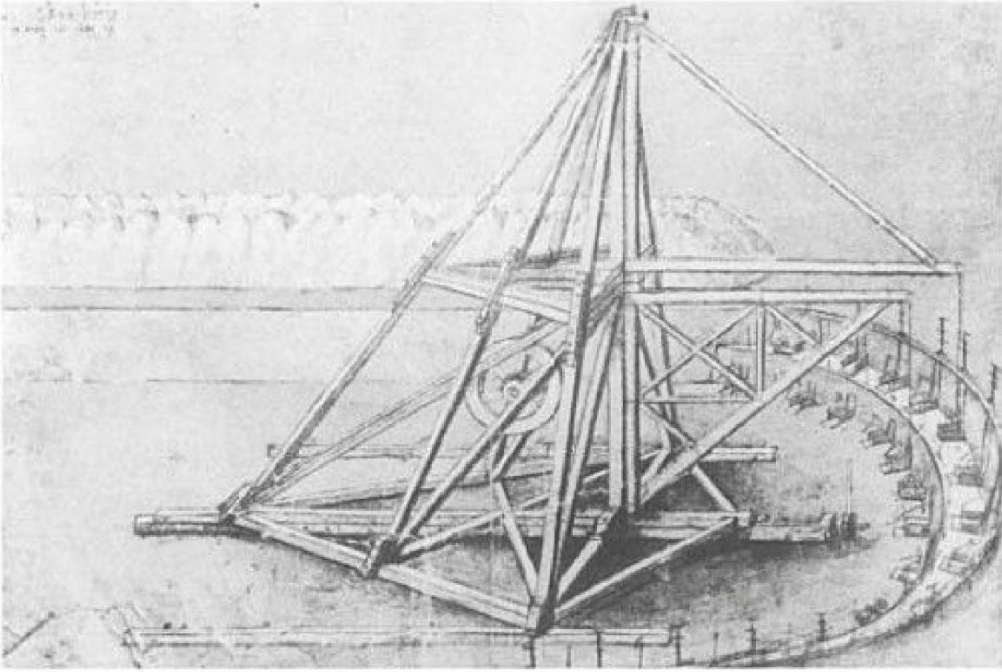

Figure 1.3. Leonardo da Vinci, Design for a Digging Machine. Codex Atlanticus, folio 1, verso b. Courtesy of Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana. “He was also aware of the inefficiency of men equipped only with hand shovels, and he designed the big treadmill-powered digging machine shown here. . . . For the Arno plan Leonardo’s Florentine superiors had calculated it would take 2,000 workers about six months to dig the necessary canals. They miscalculated by a multiple of 5” (Ludwig H. Heydenreich, “The Military Architect,” in *The Unknown Leonardo*, ed. Ladislao Reti [New York: McGraw Hill, 1974], 143). For evidence that this design was intended specifically for the Arno diversion, see Carlo Pedretti, *Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 2.179–180.

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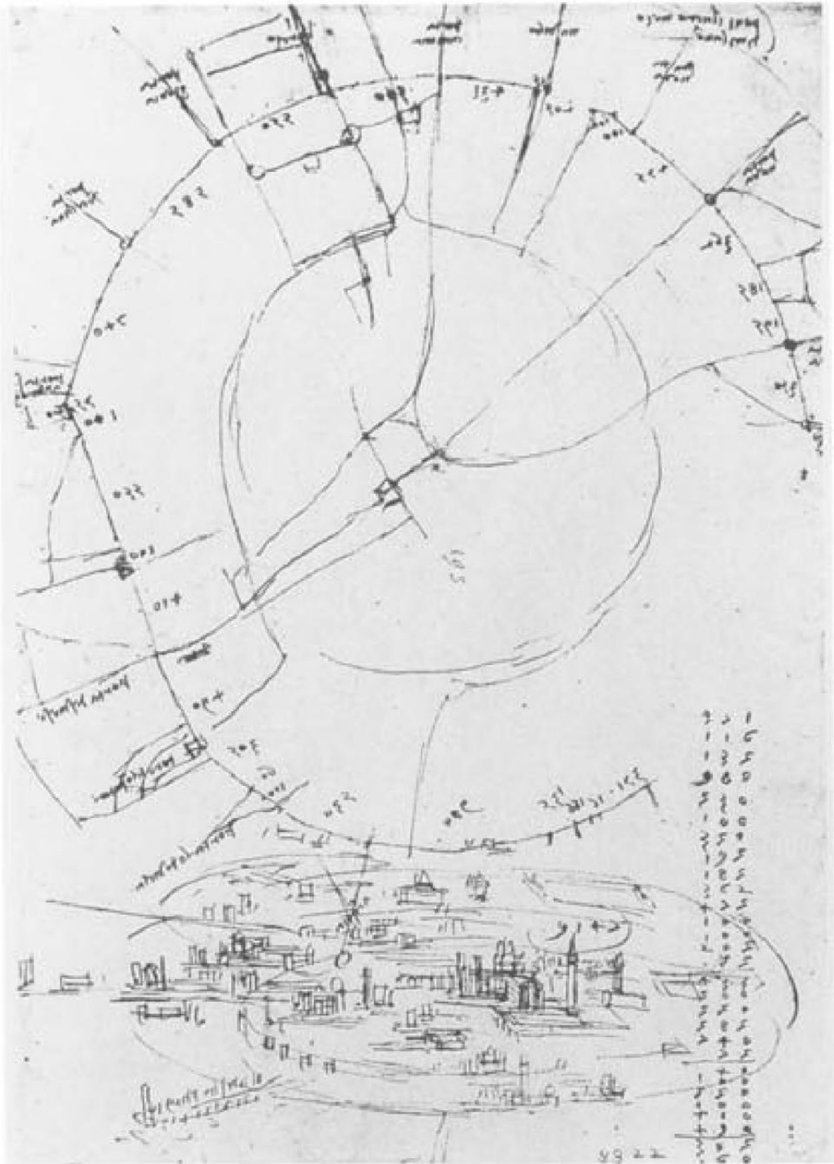

Figure 1.4. Leonardo da Vinci, Map of Milan (1490s). Courtesy of Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana. "Below the circular plan of the city is a view in perspective. The cathedral is near the center and to the left is the Castello Sforzesco" (Maria Costantino, *Leonardo: Artist, Inventor, Scientist* [New York: Crescent Books, 1993], 27).

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II. Machiavelli's Relations with Leonardo

According to a widely accepted account, it was during the autumn of 1502 that Machiavelli first met Leonardo da Vinci in person.[26]

> While he was accompanying Cesare, Leonardo made the acquaintance of a little man with malicious eyes, thin lips, and short hair. Niccolò Machiavelli, the secretary of the Florentine Republic, had been sent to Romagna as an observer.[27]

Machiavelli refers explicitly in *The Prince* to his discussions with Cesare that took place the following year,[28] but he nowhere writes about this meeting, about Leonardo's service as Cesare's military engineer, or about Leonardo's return to Florence in 1503. Why, then, should anyone believe the story that Machiavelli met Leonardo in 1502?

To consider the possibility that Machiavelli and Leonardo met in Cesare Borgia's court, first we must turn to Machiavelli's official reports to the Florentine government during his mission of 1502/3—the so-called *Legations to Valentino*.[29] In assessing these documents, however, it is important to recall that, in Renaissance letter-writing, "obscurity" was often considered "permissible" by no less an authority than Erasmus. Machiavelli, as a diplomat in delicate and sometimes dangerous situations, often remained silent or used indirect phrasing (and even ciphers) in his writing—a practice that would have been especially prudent when reporting from the court of a ruler as brutal and as unpredictable as Cesare Borgia.[30]

When he first arrived at Cesare's court, Machiavelli wrote in a dispatch that "it's part of my assignment to write you [the Signoria] how many visitors are at this nobleman's court, where they are staying, and many other local particulars."[31] Given that assignment, is it likely that a man as inquisitive as Machiavelli would have failed to meet someone as well-known as Leonardo, a Florentine serving as Cesare's military engineer and advisor? Though a reported meeting between Machiavelli and Leonardo in Nuvarola on 2 November 1502 is in doubt, Machiavelli wrote his superiors on 1 November that he had verified a conversation with Cesare's aide, Messer Agobito, by

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talking "to another who is also acquainted with this Lord's secrets"; then on 3 November, Machiavelli writes of a "long" conversation with an unnamed high official serving Cesare: "one of the first Secretaries, who confirmed everything I wrote in my other letters."[32] Since these dispatches list others by name and describe Machiavelli's meeting with the French commander and his officers, listing "Monsignore di Montison . . . Baron di Bierra, Monsignore Lo Grafis et Monsignore di Borsu, luoghitenenti di Fois, Miolans et Dunais," it is obvious that Machiavelli chose *not* to name the "first secretary" of Cesare whom he met in early November.

Several days later, on 8 November 1502, Machiavelli again wrote of a nameless "friend" whose analysis he thought important to communicate to the Signoria.[33] In his letter of 26 December Machiavelli wrote that Borgia's "chief secretaries have many times asserted to me that he does not tell them anything except when he orders it."[34] Was one of these unnamed people Leonardo da Vinci? We cannot say with certainty.[35]

Machiavelli's reticence to name his contacts is easily explained by the danger that his reports might be intercepted by Cesare, but it leaves us with probabilities rather than absolute proof. Although Machiavelli's *Legations to Valentino* do not definitively establish that he talked with Leonardo frequently, these letters make a meeting in Imola during November seem highly likely. From Leonardo's diary (Manuscript L in Paris), we know he traveled extensively with Cesare to Imola, Cesena, Rimini, Urbino, Pesaro, and Piombino; Leonardo's magnificent map of Imola (Figure 1.5), a fortified town which Cesare took from Jacopo Appiani two years earlier, apparently dates from autumn 1502.[36] Since Machiavelli was in Imola from October to early December 1502, it is hard to believe that the Florentine emissary did not meet Cesare's "general engineer and architect" at official functions; Machiavelli's dispatches suggest he met virtually everyone of importance present in Cesare's court, making it reasonable to suppose that the two Florentines met there if not elsewhere.[37]

Although some scholars still doubt that they met, there is no question that Machiavelli knew of Leonardo by reputation. This is proven by a letter sent to Machiavelli in 1503, announcing the birth of his first son and reassuring Machiavelli that he could not be

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cuckold because the boy looked just like his father: “Congratulations! Truly your Madonna Marietta did not deceive you, for he is your spitting image. Leonardo da Vinci would not have done a better portrait.”[38] While this phrase—apparently the only explicit mention of Leonardo in Machiavelli’s extant private papers—has been used to claim the two were not friends, it surely demonstrates acquaintanceship.[39]

In March 1503, Leonardo returned to Florence as suddenly as he had departed. He soon was engaged in the first of four projects in which he served the Republic. On three matters, Leonardo served as a technical advisor or consulting architect for projects associated with military and foreign affairs: the fortification of La Verucca, a fort deemed essential to the siege of Pisa; the decision to divert the Arno River in order to deprive the Pisans of water and force their capitulation; and a technical mission to improve the port and fortress of Piombino in order to maintain the favor of its ruler, Jacopo IV Appiani. The remaining commission was more visible to the public: the painting of a large mural in the Grand Council Hall of the Palazzo della Signoria. To understand the likelihood that Machiavelli knew and worked with Leonardo, it is necessary to describe these events chronologically in the context of Florentine politics.

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Figure 1.5. Leonardo da Vinci, Map of Imola (c. 1503), pen, ink and watercolor, 17 1/3 × 22 2/3 inches (44 × 60.2 cm). Windsor Castle, Royal Library 12284. Courtesy of The Royal Collection © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. "The castle of Imola appears at the lower left of the plan, surrounded by a moat. At either side of the drawing are notes in Leonardo's mirror writing which refer to the geography, distance, and bearings of towns

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and cities of military interest to Cesare Borgia, Leonardo's patron" (Costantino, *Leonardo*, 93).

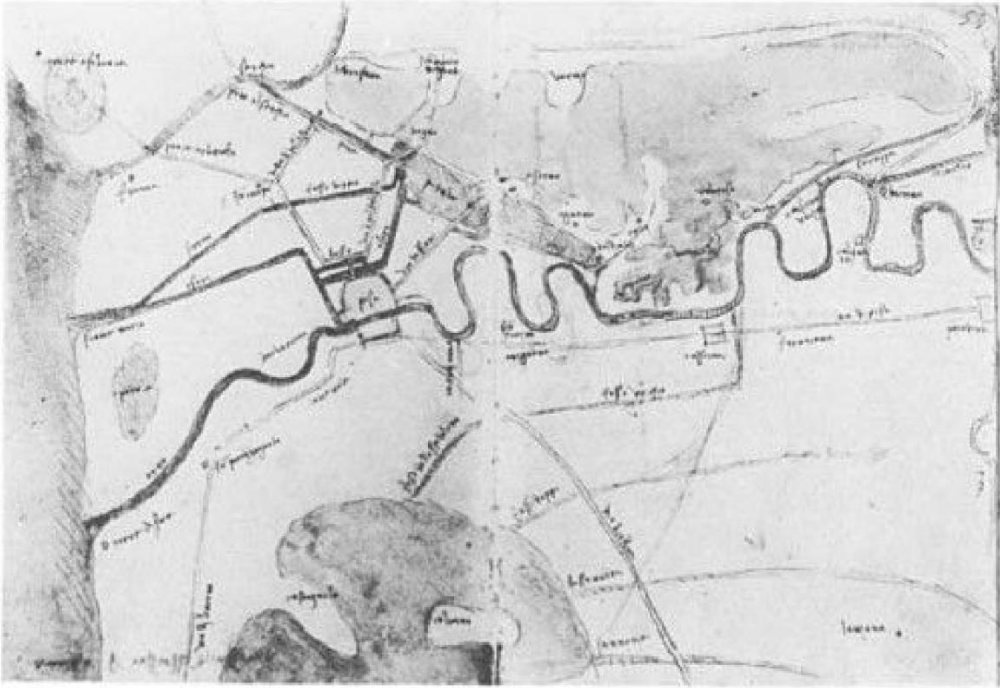

Figure 1.6. Leonardo da Vinci, Scheme for Canalizing the River Arno. Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.

When Machiavelli came to office, one of the essential issues facing the Republican government was the rebellion of Pisa, which was besieged without success by the Florentines. On 14 June 1503, Machiavelli formulated a plan to attack the fortress of La Verruca, a key strategic point in the Pisan campaign. The attack was successful, and on 21 June of that year Leonardo visited the site to plan modifications in order to make it "impregnable." In this context, Leonardo drew maps from an aerial perspective, using a new point of view outlined in both his *Treatise on Painting* and the dedication to Machiavelli's *Prince*.[40]

Shortly thereafter, Leonardo was again consulted by the government, this time with regard to a plan to divert the river Arno as

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a means of successfully concluding the siege of Pisa.[41] On 23 July 1503, Leonardo went to the Florentine camp to advise on the feasibility of the project; Francesco Guiducci's memorandum of 24 July 1503 to the Committee of Ten (the governmental body responsible for military affairs, which Machiavelli served as Secretary) records Leonardo's approval of the diversion project (see Appendix 1.2 A). Leonardo, the only one of several *Maestri d'Acqui* (hydraulic engineers) named in this memorandum, was exceptionally well qualified, since he had studied the dynamics of water extensively and, a decade earlier, developed a detailed plan to divert the Arno for peaceful purposes.

Leonardo's *Notebooks* contain evidence of his involvement in the attempted diversion of the Arno. In designing his earlier scheme, Leonardo had drawn extensive and highly detailed maps of the Arno river valley; indeed, one component of the earlier plan had been a tunnel under Serravalle, the route ultimately followed by the autostrada from Florence to the sea.[42] When working as a military architect for Cesare Borgia, Leonardo drew new maps, some of which use the aerial perspective (Figure 3.2). With regard to the military project directed against Pisa, probably in conjunction with his visit to the field in July 1503, Leonardo drew yet another map which indicates the location of a single canal diverting the Arno to the Stagno (Figure 1.6).

Machiavelli had other responsibilities in addition to the military campaign against Pisa. On 18 August 1503, Pope Alexander VI died —apparently, it is now surmised, as a result of poison Borgia intended for one of the Orsini; Cesare, who probably consumed by accident some of the poison, survived its effects but soon lost power. The election of Pope Pius III on 22 September was almost immediately followed by the new pope's death on 16 October and the election of Julius II as his successor on 31 October. We know that Machiavelli was in Rome at this time, both from his official report to the Florentine Signoria announcing the election of Julius and from his description of the conversation with Cesare in *The Prince*.[43]

During the summer of 1503, Soderini had decided to have large frescos painted in the newly completed Grand Council Hall of the Palazzo della Signoria. Because of the importance of the work, it can

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be assumed that the choice of artists was a significant political matter. Since Michelangelo also had supporters (his statue of David had been commissioned by the city in 1501 and ultimately he was asked to paint a mural on another wall of the Council Hall), some art historians believe Machiavelli's views may well have been crucial, either when Leonardo received the commission in October 1503 or later when Soderini complained about paying Leonardo because he seemed too slow in completing the painting.[44] Despite Machiavelli's diplomatic activities at this time, as one of Soderini's closest collaborators he could hardly have been unaware of Leonardo's commission and the controversies it entailed.[45]

From 1503 to 1506 Leonardo worked on the cartoon of his painting for the Council Hall, the famous *Battle of Anghiari* (Frontispiece, Figures 1.7 and 4.5). To acquaint Leonardo with the event, a description of the battle was written in his notebooks by another hand; although a few scholars once thought this might be written by Machiavelli himself, the description is now thought to be in the handwriting of Agostino Vespucci, one of Machiavelli's assistants at the Signoria. The same handwriting is found on an important letter from Leonardo to Cardinal Ippolito d'Este written in 1507.[46] It should go without saying that handwriting on both of these documents by Agostino Vespucci provides especially strong evidence of a close working relationship with Machiavelli.

Meanwhile, with the strong support of Machiavelli himself, Soderini and the Signoria embarked on the work required for the diversion of the Arno. Scholars have disagreed on the precise roles of Leonardo and Machiavelli in this project. Because Leonardo was primarily occupied with *The Battle of Anghiari*, his contribution to the diversion seems to have been limited to consultation on viability and design; there is no evidence that Leonardo himself worked in the field. The evidence marshaled by Fachard shows that an architect named Colombino was the principal specialist in charge and that Machiavelli, while delegating routine organization to Buonaccorsi and relying on Giuliano Lapi and others for direction in the field, followed the project closely. In particular, on several occasions, Machiavelli warns those in the field of the danger of relying too much on Colombino's engineering skill (see Appendix I.4).

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Figure 1.7. Leonardo da Vinci., Study for Central and Left Groups for *Battle of Anghiari* (c. 1503–04), pen and ink, 5 3/4 × 6 inches (14.5 × 15.2 cm). Courtesy of Galleria dell' Accademia, Venice.

Leonardo's drawings for *The Battle of Anghiari* advanced only slowly, in part because he sought to depict the movement of battle with hitherto unknown perfection. The only formal document I have found linking the names of Leonardo and Machiavelli dates from this period. On 4 May 1504, to ensure completion of the mural which Leonardo had begun the preceding October, the Signoria agreed to

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give Leonardo "an advance of thirty-five florins and . . . a monthly salary of fifteen florins" on condition that he "finish the composition [i.e., the cartoon] of the *Battle* by the following February" and providing that a separate contract would be drawn up for painting the mural itself; the text indicates that Machiavelli witnessed the action.[47]

Meanwhile, work on the Arno project was hampered by limited funds. The estimated number of laborers needed to dig the canal proved five times too low. It has been argued that this mistake could not have been due to Leonardo, whose notebooks from the 1490s reveal careful calculations of the manpower necessary to build such channels as well as designs for machines to do the work more efficiently. As difficulties mounted, Machiavelli seems to have become greatly concerned about the outcome.

Of the ninety-five memoranda that Machiavelli himself wrote on the project, the critical text is dated 20 September 1504 (Appendix I.4). Writing to Giuliano Lapi, Machiavelli says that "we prefer" the "first plan" of the diversion to the "second plan." The first plan seems to correspond to the map of the diversion drawn by Leonardo that was discovered in Madrid in 1970 (Figure 1.6); the second seems the same as the final project attributed to Colombino in Buonaccorsi's *Sunmario* and illustrated by the map in his *Diary* (Figure 1.11). Although Machiavelli makes his preference clear, he concludes his letter by authorizing Lapi to use his judgment in the light of necessities in the field.[48]

The next day, Machiavelli again wrote Lapi—this time with urgency—warning that the plan being followed had a potentially disastrous defect. With the canals proposed in the "second plan," Machiavelli notes, the water will not flow as anticipated and the entire project could be destroyed (Machiavelli to Lapi, 21 September 1504; Appendix I.4). According to Buonaccorsi's description of the events, this is precisely what happened: due to the depth of the diversionary canals, the Arno only flowed into them when the river was in flood; as the river fell, water flowed backwards from the weir into the river, destroying the works and forcing abandonment of the project (Appendix I.5).[49]

While the texts cited by Fachard and reproduced in Appendix I contradict Pedretti's hypothesis that Machiavelli and Leonardo

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worked extensively together in implementing the planned diversion, these texts do prove that Machiavelli was precisely informed on the technical aspects of the diversionary canals—and that he criticized the work in the field on the basis of an earlier design by an unnamed specialist. There is no evidence that Machiavelli, apparently trained as a humanist and poet, either studied hydraulic engineering or had the practical experience with the flow of rivers of the typical *Maestri d'Acqui*. While Leonardo is the most plausible source for Machiavelli's criticism of Colombino, Berardi, and other engineers, even skeptics need to admit that Machiavelli's administrative oversight of the diversion of the Arno reveals extensive knowledge of the technical problems of channeling rivers through "dikes and banks."[50]

Whether caused by political shortcomings in financing or technical errors in execution, a partially completed section of the new channel collapsed after about a year's work. Despite Machiavelli's entreaties, the Signoria abandoned the attempt to redirect the river in October 1504, and pursued the war by more conventional means.[51] Blame for the failure was directed at Colombino, who had been criticized in Tomassino's letter to the Committee of Ten on 28 September 1504 (Appendix I.4F). Buonaccorsi's personal draft describing the disaster names Colombino as the engineer responsible for the revised plan, although the manuscript revised for circulation deletes this identification (see Appendix I.5). When Piero Soderini's brother Francesco learned of the failure, his letter to Machiavelli likewise attributes it to the "fault of those engineers, who went so far wrong."[52]

After the projected diversion of the Arno failed, Machiavelli himself refers to it in *The First Decennale*, a poem written in late 1504 that recounts the political events in Italy from 1494 to 1504: in the war against Pisa, "you [Florence] tried to turn the Arno aside through different courses."[53] Neither in this passage nor in general remarks about attempts to divert rivers while besieging cities, does Machiavelli refer to his own role in this attempt. Hence Machiavelli's silence about Leonardo's advice on the Arno project could well be interpreted as part of a broader reticence to speak about his own failures.

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Other events indicate that Machiavelli continued his contacts with Leonardo after the plan to rechannel the Arno was abandoned. It became important for Florence to gain the goodwill of Jacopo Appiani, newly restored ruler of the strategic port city of Piombino, whose deposition by Cesare Borgia in 1499 had been tacitly supported by Florence. Earlier in 1504, Machiavelli went on a diplomatic mission to Piombino to secure Jacopo's benevolent neutrality toward Florence's rivalry with Pisa and Sienna. To implement the agreements reached at that meeting, in November 1504 Leonardo was sent to Piombino to provide technical assistance in redesigning the fortifications and port, which he knew well from previous work there under Cesare.[54]

In 1505, Leonardo requested—and received from the Signoria—additional funds to complete *The Battle of Anghiari*. On 6 June, he recorded in his *Notebooks* that "I began to paint in the palace." Although the results were astounding, the painting itself was a failure; because Leonardo chose to paint with experimental materials that proved defective, the painting was never finished and—after his death—had to be destroyed.[55]

During these years, Leonardo was engaged in other activities, some of which might also have led him to encounter Machiavelli. Although the *Mona Lisa* is usually dated from this period of Leonardo's work, for present purposes it is probably more important that he continued his studies of science and technology, including most notably the construction of a flying machine with which Leonardo himself attempted to fly.[56] As will be shown below, Leonardo's innovations in military technology seem to parallel Machiavelli's innovations in military strategy, suggesting a parallelism—and perhaps a direct influence—that has escaped prior commentators.

On 30 May 1506, Leonardo went to Milan, now under the control of the French king, Louis XII, promising to return after three months to complete *The Battle of Anghiari*. In August, Charles d'Amboise, the Governor of Milan, requested an extension of Leonardo's leave from Florence. While Leonardo was in Milan as the French king's "regular painter and engineer," his uncle died and Leonardo returned to Florence to defend his inheritance against a legal challenge. This event might be important because Leonardo's notebooks contain the

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draft of a letter to a "Messer Nicolò" seeking legal assistance. Although Beltrami and several other scholars believe it was addressed to Machiavelli in 1507,[57] other specialists like Pedretti date the letter in 1514 and suggest the addressee is Niccolò Michelozzi, a humanist who was Machiavelli's successor in the Chancery after the Florentine Republic fell in 1512.[58] While the letter does not prove the existence of a close and long-standing personal relationship between Machiavelli and Leonardo, it reminds us of the possibility if not the likelihood that they would have met again at the Rucellai gardens while Leonardo was in Florence in 1507 and 1508.[59]

After 1509, Leonardo worked in Milan until the expulsion of the French in 1512. In addition to painting *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne and a Lamb* (Figure 4.6) and *St. John the Baptist*, Leonardo's major activities during this time included extensive anatomical studies (Figure 1.8); among his major architectural projects was the design of a villa for Charles d'Amboise remarkable for its complex irrigation and artistic water distribution system.[60] In 1512, the French were driven from Milan by a coalition of the pope, the Venetians, and the Spaniards; in the same year, the Florentine Republic was overthrown and the Medici returned to power.

Leonardo left Milan on 24 September 1513, and after visiting Florence briefly, went to Rome on 1 December to enter the service of Giuliano de' Medici.[61] While in Rome, Leonardo did not receive the major artistic commissions given to other painters patronized by the Medici (including Donato Bramante, Raphael, and Michelangelo). Instead, Giuliano commissioned him to draft an ambitious plan for draining the Pontine Marshes and to work on a solar mirror for use in cloth-making, although he did complete several paintings for Baldassare Turini, a papal notary.[62]

Machiavelli, meanwhile, found himself out of power and without resources. After the Medici returned to power in Florence in 1512, Machiavelli was accused of participating in a plot against them, arrested, and tortured; on his release from jail, he returned to his home in San Casciano, outside of Florence, with the condition that he could neither leave the territory of Florence nor enter the Signoria for one year. It is at this time that he wrote *The Prince*, as recorded in his famous letter to Vettori of 13 December 1513, which states that the

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work is being dedicated to Giuliano de' Medici.[63]

In 1515, Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, Giuliano's nephew, was named Governor of Florence; Leonardo seems to have returned to Florence to design stables and a new Medici palace for the younger Lorenzo.[64] After the death of Giuliano de' Medici in 1516, Leonardo found his way back to the service of the French, moving to Romorantin and then Amboise with King Francis I. During this period, however, Leonardo continued to work for Lorenzo de' Piero de Medici, who was aligned with the French court; hence, when Lorenzo married Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne in 1518, the festivities at the royal court in Amboise included a *Paradise* play that Leonardo originally designed for Sforza in Milan a generation earlier.[65]

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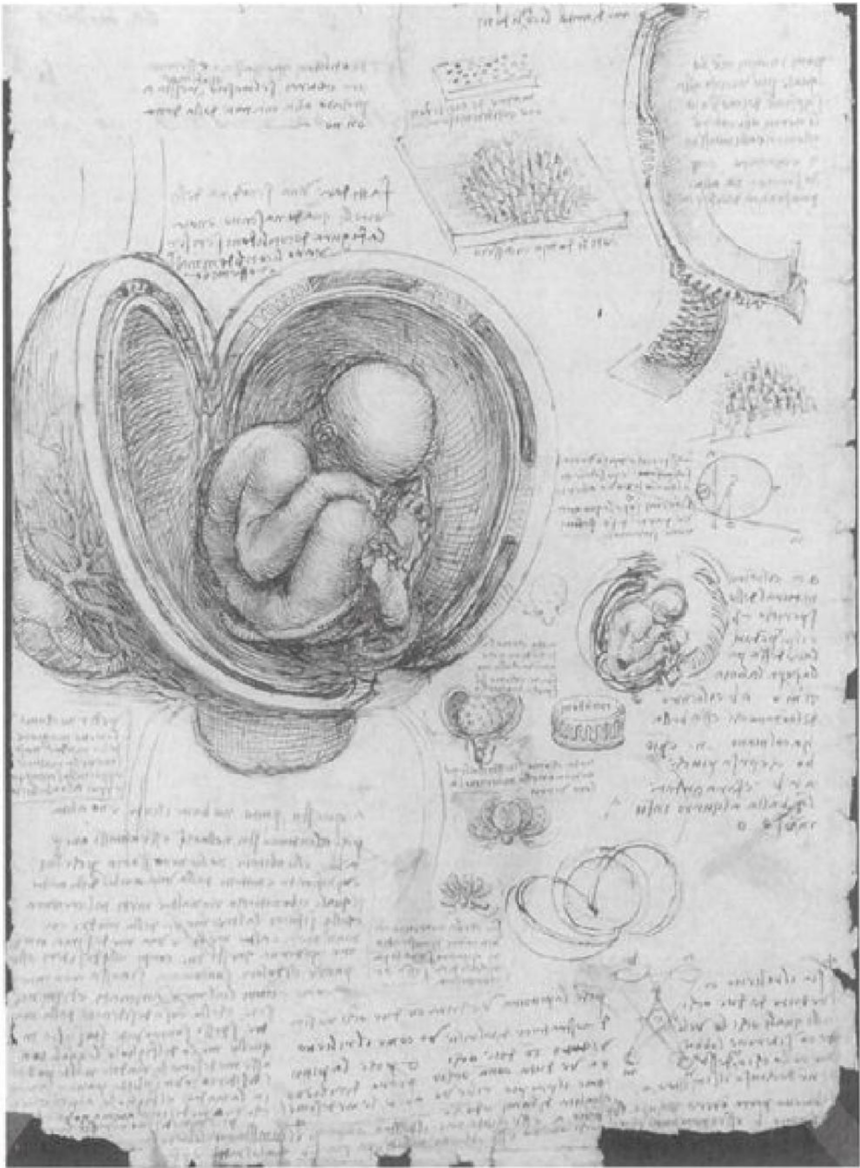

Figure 1.8. Leonardo da Vinci, Embryo in the Uterus (c. 1510), pen and ink, 11 7/8 x 8 1/2 inches (30.1 x 21.4 cm). Windsor Castle, Royal Library 19102r. Courtesy of The Royal Collection © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

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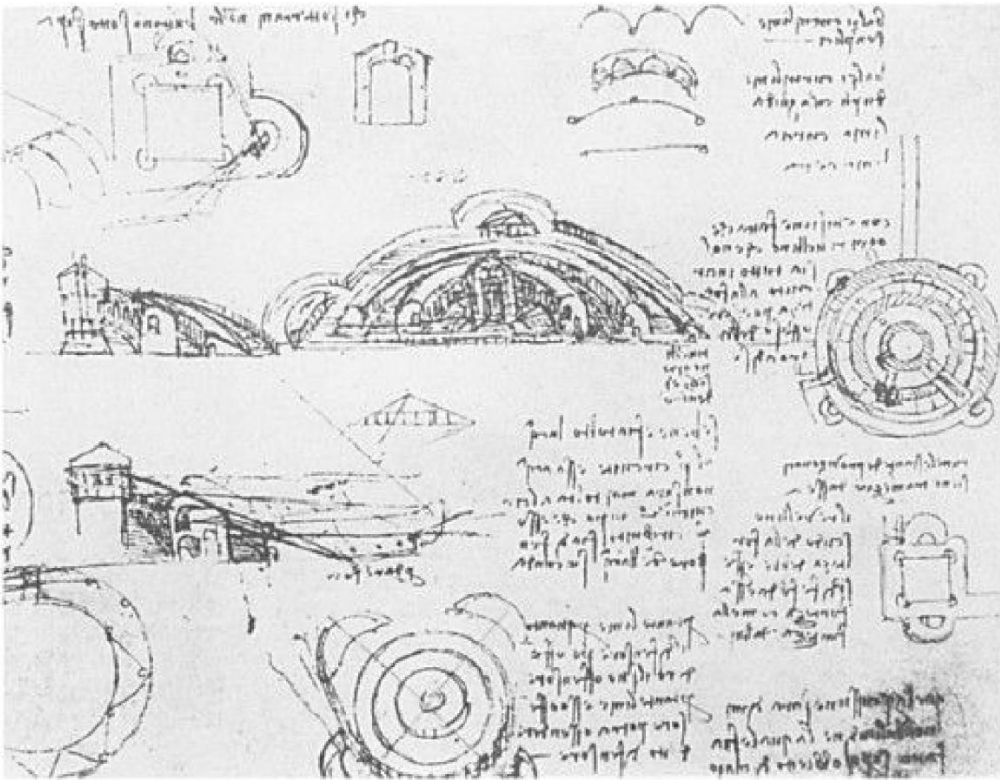

Figure 1.9. Leonardo da Vinci, Design for a Fortress. Codex Atlanticus, folio 48, recto b. Courtesy of Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana. Upper left: Leonardo's note reads "Along as many lines as the defender can strike at the offender, the offender will be able to strike at the defender." Upper right: Leonardo notes "to open fire." "Out of his labors at Piombino, Leonardo evolved a design for a fortress so different its like would not be seen for centuries. . . . Outposts on the four corners furnish flanking fire. Concentric fortified rings provide firing positions for the defenders of the citadel. Between the rings are trench-like areas that could be flooded if the enemies breached the outer walls, enabling the defenders to retreat to strongpoints in the innermost rings" (Heydenreich, "The Military Architect," 162–163).

After moving to France, although Leonardo's ability to paint seems to have been limited by a stroke, he designed a new palace at Romorantin for Francis I. Although the project was abandoned at Leonardo's death, it has been speculated that Leonardo's projects

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influenced the castle at Chambord, which is conventionally viewed as the first major building of the French Renaissance.[66] His activity reduced by ill health, Leonardo was on exceptionally close terms with the French king; he died on 2 May 1519 at the Chateau of Amboise—according to Vasari, in the arms of King Francis I—at the age of sixty-seven.[67]

In these years, Machiavelli continued to write, completing both *The Prince* (changing the dedication from Giuliano to Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, according to most accounts after the former's death in 1516) and the *Discourses on Titus Livy*. Although neither was published in Machiavelli's lifetime, we now know that *The Prince* was not materially changed after 15 September 1520 (the latest date possible for one of the three extant manuscript copies made by Buonaccorsi).[68] Thereafter, Machiavelli wrote and published *The Art of War*, a dialogue on military strategy of greater importance than has usually been recognized, as well as plays and fables, of which the most famous is *Mandragola*.[69] In addition to reading these works in the gardens of the Rucellai family—the famous Orti Oricellari for which Leonardo designed a novel fountain[70]—Machiavelli finally secured a commission from the Medici in 1519 to write a history of Florence; dedicated to Pope Leo X, the *Florentine Histories* was published in 1525.

A number of passages in these works provide evidence of Leonardo's influence on Machiavelli. Apart from textual parallels between Machiavelli's *Prince* and Leonardo's *Notebooks* to be discussed at length below, there are important similarities between Leonardo's innovations and Machiavelli's views of military strategy as outlined in the *Discourses on Titus Livy* and *The Art of War*. For example, Leonardo seems to have been the first to understand how massed artillery changed the balance of forces between offense and defense by destroying the invulnerability of the traditional thick-walled medieval castle; Machiavelli emphatically endorses this view.[71] As a result, Leonardo envisaged a radically new way of building fortifications with lower curved walls and moats (Figure 1.9), an innovation adopted with some modifications in Machiavelli's *Art of War*.

Leonardo's *Notebooks* contain other indications of potential

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influence on Machiavelli's thought. When Machiavelli seeks an example to show that, apart from cannon and gunpowder, technical innovations usually have little effect on the outcome of battles, he speaks "of elephants, of scythed chariots and of other strong opponents that the Roman infantry opposed."[72] Every schoolboy knows of Hannibal's use of elephants when crossing the Alps, but the reference to scythed chariots is more obscure; although such a device is described in Xenophon's *Anabasis* as an invention used by the Persians against the Greeks, it was also used by Archelaus against Romans under the command of Sulla. Machiavelli's use of this illustration might reflect Leonardo's drawings of such a device (Figure 1.10), which accompany pictures of other machines of war.[73]

Another example of possible influence occurs in Book VI of the *Florentine Histories*, where Machiavelli describes a violent and highly destructive windstorm that devastated the Val d'Arno on 24 August 1456. Although there is no published record of this tornado, which occurred thirteen years before Machiavelli himself was born, his account is exceptionally vivid:

> a whirlwind of a cloud, huge and dense, which reached almost two miles wide throughout its course . . . driven by superior forces, whether they were natural or supernatural, broke on itself and fought within itself; and the shattered clouds, now rising toward the sky, now descending toward the earth, crashed together; and then they moved in circles with very great velocity and stirred up ahead of them a wind violent beyond all measure. . . . From these clouds, so broken and confused, from such furious winds and such frequent flashes, arose a noise never before heard from any earthquake or thunder of any kind or greatness; from it arose such fear that anyone who heard it judged that the end of the world had come and that earth, water, and the rest of the sky and the world would return mixed together to its ancient chaos.[74]

Leonardo was four years old at the time the storm passed through the valley, and his *Notebooks* contain striking drawings of such a storm as well as verbal descriptions of similar cataclysms. As a result, Pedretti claims that this passage must have been the result of Machiavelli's conversations with Leonardo.[75]

A final indication of the relationship between Machiavelli and

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Leonardo comes from the last years of Machiavelli's life, when he was engaged in missions in the Romagna as an advisor to his friend Francesco Guiccardini, then governor of Modena. In September 1526 Guiccardini wrote Robert Accioatoli that "I sent you, in a letter from Machiavelli from the camp of Cremona, a drawing of these trenches that is not in the hand of Leonardo da Vinci."[76] While this probably merely means that the drawing is of poor quality (and not that Machiavelli had in his possession other architectural sketches by Leonardo), Guiccardini's usage implies that without the specification, his correspondent might expect Machiavelli's description of a military site to be accompanied by a drawing as good as those of Leonardo.

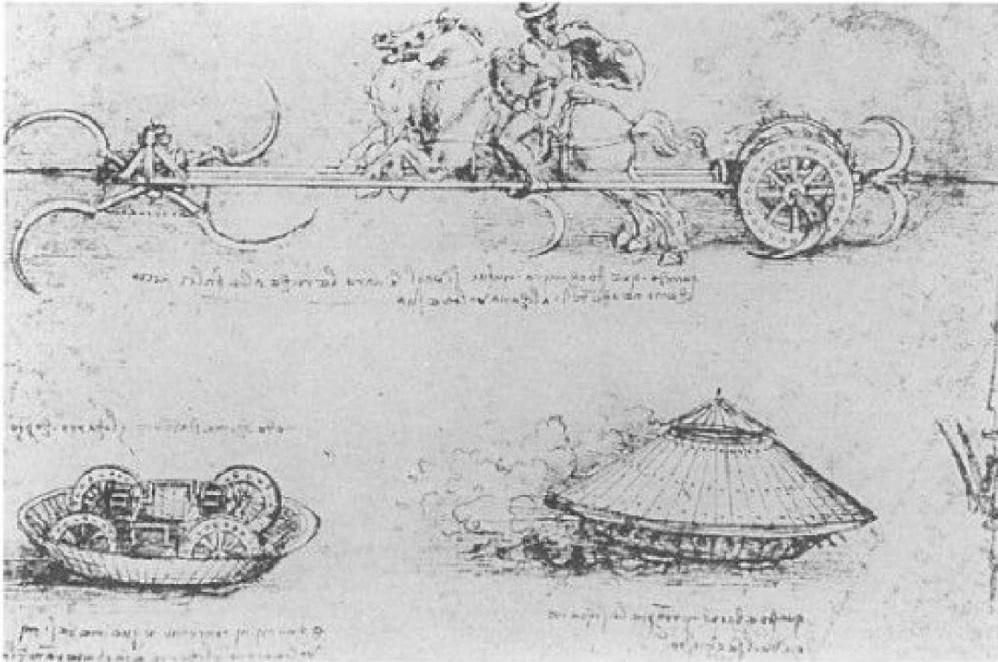

Figure 1.10. Leonardo da Vinci, A Scythed Chariot, an Armoured Vehicle, and a Partisan (c. 1485–88), pen, ink, and wash, 6 7/8 x 9 5/8 inches (17.3 x 24.6 cm). Courtesy of the British Museum.

In Machiavelli's last years, although his *Mandragola* was successfully performed, he never regained the status of his years as

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Secretary to the Signoria. Even his patronage from the Medici, secured after years of effort, worked against him. When the Medici were again overthrown in 1527, Machiavelli offered his services to the new republic but, ironically, was rebuffed shortly before his death on 22 June 1527. It was only posthumously that his most famous works were published: *The Discourses on Titus Livy* in 1531 and *The Prince* in 1532.

III. The Facts and Their Interpretation

To interpret such a tangled web of detail, it will be useful to begin from a summary of the agreed facts:

- Leonardo and Machiavelli were Florentine contemporaries who had ample opportunities to meet when the former was serving Cesare Borgia as military architect (1502/3). At least one letter to Machiavelli confirms that, by 1503, he must have known of Leonardo by reputation.
- Several ambiguous passages in Machiavelli's *Legations to Valentino* (especially in his letters of 3 November, 8 November, and 26 December 1502) might be interpreted as referring to Leonardo.
- After both returned to Florence, on at least four occasions Machiavelli was responsible for a project on which Leonardo worked or was consulted: the fortification of La Verruca in the Val d'Arno (1503); the attempt to redirect the Arno in the war between Florence and Pisa (1503/4); the painting of *The Battle of Anghiari* in the Palace of the Signoria (1503-1506); and the technical mission to Jacopo Appiani of Piombino (1504).
- On 23 July 1503, Leonardo went to the site to assess the feasibility of diverting the Arno; documents recording his approval of the project and Machiavelli's later memoranda concerning its execution indicate that they must have known each other.
- As preparation for painting *The Battle of Anghiari*, a description of the event in Leonardo's *Notebooks* is written by

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Machiavelli's secretary, Agostino Vespucci; the same handwriting appears in a letter that Leonardo sent to Cardinale Ippolito d'Este in 1507, when seeking support in the contest over the will of his uncle.

- As Second Chancellor of the Signoria, Machiavelli had direct knowledge of the conflict between Leonardo and Soderini over payments to the artist and his failure to complete *The Battle of Anghiari:* the decision of 4 May 1504, setting the terms of Leonardo's future work, was witnessed by Machiavelli. Moreover, it would have been impossible for anyone working in the Signoria to be unaware of Leonardo's extraordinary and well-known painting.
- Although Machiavelli delegated day-to-day direction of the abortive effort to redirect the Arno in the war against Pisa (1503/4), documentary evidence shows his awareness of technical details in the plans being followed. The famous comparison of fortune with a river (*Prince*, ch. 25) can be read, at one level, as referring to Leonardo's projects to control the flow of rivers, many of which were directed toward economic development (projects in the Arno and Adda river valleys and the Pontine Marshes) rather than to military purposes.
- As will be shown in following chapters, there are other passages in *The Prince*—notably the description of those who "sketch landscapes" in the dedication—which are parallel to texts by Leonardo and seem inspired by him. Also of importance are the discussion of fortresses (*Prince*, ch. 20) and the prince's need to study "nature of sites" (*Prince*, ch. 14), both of which reveal views like those of Leonardo.
- Machiavelli's military strategy, as developed in both the *Discourses on Titus Livy* and *The Art of War*, accepts innovations found only in the work of Leonardo and shows the influence of his views of warfare.
- In *Florentine Histories* (Book VI, ch. 24), Machiavelli presents a vivid first-hand description of a violent tempest that devastated the Val d'Arno in 1456, when Leonardo was four years old and thirteen years before Machiavelli's birth; Leonardo himself described and drew such a storm, and there

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are no other contemporary records of the cataclysm of 1456.

Beneath these personal contacts and textual parallels is a deeper similarity in the conceptions of theory, practice, and human history set forth in Leonardo's *Notebooks* and Machiavelli's *Prince, Discourses*, and *Florentine Histories*.[77] The evidence that Leonardo and Machiavelli knew of each other, combined with the possibility they may have been friends between 1502 and 1507 (and perhaps as late as 1515), suggests that similarities in their views could be the result of shared interests and direct influence. Even should scholars reject this interpretation, the parallels suggest the need to consider Machiavelli's contribution to modernity in the light of the similarity between his views and Leonardo's innovative integration of theory and practice.

As if to confirm these parallels, Machiavelli's silence concerning Leonardo extends to silence concerning Machiavelli's own role in any of the four projects on which they seem to have collaborated. Two of these events are described in a general way by Machiavelli, albeit without mentioning his own involvement: the diversion of the Arno (*First Decennale*) and the fortification of La Verruca (*Discourses*, II, 24). The failure to discuss Leonardo thus appears to be part of a broader reticence of Machiavelli.

Leonardo is known for the immense range of his inventive projects, many of which anticipated Western technological developments by three or four centuries. Machiavelli shows great reticence about the strategic importance of innovations, arguing that most are essentially deceptions whose effect depends on the naïveté of the enemy.[78] Could there be something in Leonardo's view of science, technology, and human life which Machiavelli either rejects or prefers to hide from his readers? Perhaps the puzzle, which has led us on the chase for obscure clues, is itself the message Machiavelli wished to give his most acute readers.

The historical record alone is insufficient ground for a final conclusion on the nature and extent of the relationship between Machiavelli and Leonardo. As indicated by Machiavelli's failure to mention such collaborators as Biagio Buonaccorsi, many people and events were not recorded in Machiavelli's letters and writings. It is

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therefore necessary to focus on the only evidence that Machiavelli unambiguously bequeathed to us—the texts of his major writings. But if Machiavelli was as “Machiavellian” as he is reputed to have been, how can we understand what he wrote? To analyze Machiavelli’s thought, we must first discover how to read his work.

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Chapter Two

On Reading Machiavelli's "Prince"

Machiavelli's The Prince *is the book of republicans*.

Rousseau

This essay considers Niccolò Machiavelli to be one of the greatest thinkers in Western civilization. To justify this conclusion, I will focus on *The Prince*. This book is well known, has been historically important, and, in Machiavelli's own words, can enable a reader "to understand in a very short time all that I have learned and understood."[1] But how should we read Machiavelli's *Prince*? Is it merely a book of circumstance, written to gain Machiavelli a job with the Medici? Is it an amoral—or immoral—justification of the use of power for its own sake? Does it contradict the longer and ostensibly more complete *Discourses on Titus Livy*, or does it present the same understanding that Machiavelli expressed in his other works?

These questions are important because Machiavelli is so often said to have inaugurated "modern" thought. Typically, *The Prince* is described as the first *scientific* study of politics and human affairs. In our curriculum, Machiavelli usually represents the end of the "classic" and "medieval" periods, which were based on theological and philosophical premises distant from

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contemporary life; his teaching is presented as the beginning of the intellectual horizon known as "modernity."[2] Before reflecting on Machiavelli's thought, it is therefore prudent to clarify how his work should be read.

Although it is commonplace to rank *The Prince* among the "great books," this conventional assessment raises two questions. First, was Machiavelli a writer of the depth and importance of Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, or Hegel—that is, does his thought form a philosophical system that could be *true* and hence can be considered meaningful in the light of contemporary natural science? And second, was he somehow exceptionally devious—one might almost say "Machiavellian"—in presenting a serious political philosophy in the guise of a handbook for selfish leaders?

Unfortunately, much of what is said or written about Machiavelli and his works fails to consider these questions.[3] If the answer to either or both is negative, he was little more than the epitome of political thought in Renaissance Italy and an author of considerable historical importance. If both answers are positive, Machiavelli understood "the effectual truth of the matter" of human life and still has something to teach us. Such a claim implies that Machiavelli might even have transformed what we call epistemology, ontology, logic, or other abstract inquiries when writing what appears to be advice to political leaders. As a result, an attempt to assess Machiavelli as a major philosopher (the first of the questions posed above) entails a hard look at the deceptive nature of his writings (the second query).

There is good reason to examine both questions with an open mind. In the *Discourses on Titus Livy*—generally regarded as Machiavelli's most complete work—the author flatly asserts that he seeks to "enter upon *a new way, as yet untrodden by anyone else*" (*Discourses*, I, Pref.; p. 97). Machiavelli compares himself to Columbus, acknowledging that such innovation carries great risks: "it has *always been no less dangerous to discover new*

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ways and methods than to set off in search of new seas and unknown lands" (ibid.). Similarly, in *The Prince* Machiavelli asserts that he will "*depart from the orders of others*" (*Prince*, ch. 14; p. 61). Even Machiavelli's most celebrated literary work, the comedy *Mandragola*, begins with a Prologue in which the author introduces the play as a "*new case*."[4]

Machiavelli's claim to radical novelty is not limited to political advice in the narrow sense: on the contrary, when he compares "all men that are praised," Machiavelli lists "founding a religion" as leading to the "most" praise, followed by founding "either republics or kingdoms," then deeds of "army commanders" and "men of letters," and finally those of "any man who excels in some art and in the practice of it" (*Discourses*, I, 10; pp. 134–135). Is Machiavelli's "new way" merely a work of the "art" of writing by a "man of letters" interested in "what the modes and government of a prince should be with subjects and with friends" (*Prince*, ch. 14; p. 61)? Or, in some sense, can his work claim to be as fundamental and praiseworthy as the founding of a new religion?

To address these questions, we must bear in mind two things. First, Machiavelli's own stated goal is "that which I believe to be for the *common benefit of all*" (*Discourses*, Pref.; p. 97): despite the apparent nationalism of the last chapter of *The Prince*, even of that book the author says "my intent is to write something useful to *whoever understands it*" (*Prince*, ch. 15; p. 61). Machiavelli's explicit intention in writing his most famous works is not limited to any one political community—or indeed to any one kind of human being.[5] Could Machiavelli, like Socrates, be a philosopher who turned to human life and morality as more important than studies of "nature" more generally? Like Plato or Aristotle, he seems to be concerned with the "good life" and the means to achieve it. If, like Demetrius of Phalerum of the Peripatetic School, Machiavelli seems to focus on political life as the highest practical human goal, this may reflect considerations of the "useful" as distinct

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from an abstract or disembodied "truth."[6]

Second, we need to remember Machiavelli's classification of the three kinds of human intelligence: "*there are three kinds of brains: one that understands by itself; another that discerns what others understand, the third that understands neither by itself nor through others*; the first is most excellent, the second excellent, and the third useless" (*Prince*, ch. 22; p. 92). If Machiavelli claimed to open "a new way," he must have placed himself in this highest category. And if he claimed to have one of the few human brains "that understands by itself," there may be profound reasons—beyond Machiavelli's political fortunes after the fall of the Florentine Republic—for his decision to present his reflections on human nature and nature in a somewhat devious manner.

Although these questions may seem far-fetched, recently published evidence of Machiavelli's early career gives us reason to challenge the traditional interpretations of *The Prince*. We now know that Machiavelli was trained as a humanist and, as a young man, personally copied Lucretius's *De rerum natura*.[7] While at the court of Cesare Borgia in October 1502, he asked his assistant, Biagio Buonaccorsi, to procure a copy of Plutarch's *Lives*—a request that was difficult for Buonaccorsi to satisfy.[8] While it cannot be said with certainty whether Machiavelli and Leonardo discussed questions concerning the relationship between natural science and philosophy,[9] a private letter from Bartolomeo Vespucci, Professor of Astronomy at Padua, indicates that in 1504 Machiavelli had written that he considered the science of astronomy essential for understanding human affairs.[10] By 1506, as Machiavelli's letter to Giovan Battista Soderini shows (see Appendix II.1), he had already outlined his mature understanding of the relationship between the diversity of human natures and fortune. All these details suggest that, before writing *The Prince*, Machiavelli was concerned with issues that go far beyond the practical politics of sixteenth-century Florence.

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I propose, therefore, that we embark on a rereading of *The Prince* with an openness to three distinct possibilities. First, Machiavelli may write with hidden or esoteric meanings, so that what serious or philosophic readers discover in his works is not evident to the casual reader. Second, Machiavelli may be more interested in what was traditionally called philosophy or theoretical wisdom than has been imagined—an interest which, as I will show, could have been reinforced by the relationship with Leonardo da Vinci discussed in the last chapter.[11] Last but not least, Machiavelli's novelty may concern the relationship between theory and practice rather than details on the domain of either pragmatic political advice or philosophic speculation—and in this regard, we cannot ignore Machiavelli's own experiences as Second Secretary of the Florentine Republic, especially when they provide concrete information about the meaning of the texts of his work.

To explore these three possibilities with an open mind demands much of the reader. Lest we show ourselves to be "useless," we should try to show that we are at least of the second category "that discerns what others understand." To do so, we will need to read more closely than has been the habit of many modern commentators.

I. Is The Prince *a Satire?*

Conventional wisdom treats Machiavelli's *The Prince* as an astute, cynical, and amoral (if not immoral) guide to the use of power. Any reader can see that, on the surface, this is a reasonable impression. The first question we need to raise, therefore, is whether Machiavelli wrote in a devious or misleading way. Can *The Prince* be read as a satire on the ambition of rulers?

Serious thinkers have sometimes claimed precisely this. When Rousseau discusses monarchy in *The Social Contract*, for

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example, he asserts:

> The best kings want to be able to be wicked if it so pleases them, without ceasing to be the masters. . . . This is what Samuel so strongly pointed out to the Hebrews; and what Machiavelli showed with clarity. While pretending to give lessons to kings, he gave great ones to the people. *Machiavelli's* The Prince *is the book of republicans*.[12]

At this point, Rousseau adds a footnote on his claim that *The Prince* is a deceptive book:

> Machiavelli was an honorable man and a good citizen; but being attached to the Medici household, he was forced, during the oppression of his homeland, to disguise his love of freedom. The choice of his execrable hero is in itself enough to make manifest his *hidden intention;* and the contrast between the maxims of his book *The Prince* and those of his *Discourses on Titus Livy* and his *History of Florence* shows that this profound political theorist has had only superficial or corrupt readers until now.[13]

Does the evidence support this interpretation?

Many critics have been hesitant to accept the view that an author has a "secret" (or "esoteric") meaning, pointing out that such interpretations can subject a text to the whims and biases of the interpreter.[14] Caution in this regard is prudent. In general, one should reserve the attribution of a "hidden intention" to works that satisfy three criteria:

- The historical and intellectual context should justify the practice of writing in a devious or insincere manner.
- There should be hints, in the public writings being considered, of contradictions or confusions that direct a careful reader to the possibility of a hidden meaning.
- Correspondence or other information about the author's

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private life should indicate an awareness of deceptive writing and, if possible, the intention to practice it.

Or, to put it more simply, we should follow Rousseau's suggestion that Machiavelli's own career and "the contrast" between his different works are relevant to an understanding of *The Prince*.

II. Machiavelli's Republican Career and the Medici

As chapter one has indicated, rather more is known about Machiavelli's life and career than about most of the great thinkers of antiquity.[15] Born in 1469, he was a young man when Lorenzo the Magnificent, ruler of Florence, died in the fateful year 1492. After the reestablishment of the Florentine Republic and the interlude of "fundamentalist" piety under Savonarola (1494–1498), leadership passed to Piero Soderini, who was elected Gonfalonier for life in 1502. In 1498, Machiavelli was named to the post of Secretary (or Chancellor) to the Second Chancery—and thereafter also was named to the post of Secretary to the Ten of Liberty and Peace (a committee with responsibility for military and foreign affairs). Perhaps more important, Soderini employed the young Niccolò Machiavelli personally on many delicate foreign negotiations, including the missions to France and to the court of Cesare Borgia cited in *The Prince*.[16]

In studying Machiavelli's writings, it is therefore essential to keep in mind that he spent the years from 1498 to 1512 as a public figure, actively engaged in the political life of his native Florence. As a specialist in foreign and military affairs, he was particularly committed to a policy of establishing a native militia, replacing the mercenary troops and condottieri who seemed both unreliable and dangerous to the young republic. And as a committed supporter of Piero Soderini, Machiavelli

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was perceived as a defender of the republican form of government that replaced the autocratic rule of the Medici family.[17]

In September 1512, after the citizen's militia organized by Machiavelli suffered a disastrous military defeat at Prato, Piero Soderini was overthrown and the Medici returned to power. Machiavelli was imprisoned and, suspected of complicity in a plot to restore the republic, tortured. He was then released to his country house (in Sant' Andrea in Percussina, near San Casciano), required to post a bond of a thousand florins, forbidden either to enter the Palazzo (or seat of government) or to leave the territory of Florence for one year.[18] By March 1513, therefore, Machiavelli found himself under something akin to house arrest, under suspicion by the restored Medici rulers of Florence who were dedicated to uprooting memories of the short-lived republic.

In the year 1513, we know from correspondence that Machiavelli continued to think and write about politics. In January 1513, he had written Soderini a long and guarded letter outlining the role of fortune (in terms similar to chapter twenty-five of *The Prince*), comparing the careers of Hannibal and Scipio (parallel to the comparison in *The Prince*, chapter seventeen).[19] After his imprisonment in February and March, Machiavelli's friend Vettori, who continued to hold the post of Florentine ambassador to Rome under the Medici, asked his opinion of a truce between Spain and France;[20] Machiavelli replied on 20 April, admitting that "although I have sworn neither to think of nor discuss politics," he would "break my vow" and answer Vettori's request.[21] This correspondence with Vettori continued throughout the year, culminating in a long letter dated 10 December 1513 which has been called "the most famous letter in Italian literature."[22]

Machiavelli's letter to Vettori provides critical evidence about Machiavelli's life at the time as well as his intentions in writing *The Prince*. In reading it, however, we must bear in mind that

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Machiavelli had to consider the possibility that his letter could be intercepted and read (or misread) as a subversive document; indeed, the letter begins with a reference to just such a possibility. Years later, writing the historian Guiccardini, Machiavelli remarked that "*for a long time I have not said what I believed, nor do I ever believe what I say, and if indeed sometimes I do happen to tell the truth, I hide it among so many lies that it is hard to find*."[23] Even in private correspondence, one cannot always be sure that Machiavelli is simply telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.[24]

Machiavelli begins his famous letter of 10 December 1513 by acknowledging his friend Vettori's letter of 23 November.[25] After indicating that he had been afraid of being blamed because Vettori's prior correspondence may have been improperly divulged, Machiavelli goes on to praise Vettori for continuing his ambassadorial functions "orderedly and quietly":

> And because *Fortune wants to do everything*, she wants us to allow her to do it, to remain quiet and not give trouble, and to *await the time when she allows men something to do;* and then it will be right for you to give more effort, to watch things more, and *for me to leave my villa* and say: 'Here I am.'

While this explicitly indicates that Machiavelli will continue to avoid political activity (which, had the letter been intercepted by the Medici, could hardly have been unwelcome), what is the "something to do" that Fortune will allow? Is it any role in political life, or action associated with republican government?

Machiavelli proceeds to describe his current mode of life and activity for his friend in Rome: "I stay in my villa, and since these last chance events occurred,[26] I have not spent, to add them all up, twenty days in Florence." There follows a long description of "catching thrushes with my own hands" and an account of going "to a wood of mine that I am having cut down," giving rise to controversies and Machiavelli's decision

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not to deliver promised wood to several "citizens."[27] The letter goes on:

> When I leave the wood, I go to a spring, and from there to an aviary of mine. I have a book under my arm, Dante or Petrarch, or one of the minor poets like Tibullus, Ovid, and such. I read of their amorous passions and their loves; I remember my own and enjoy myself for a while in this thinking. Then I move on along the road to the inn; I speak with those passing by; I ask them news of their places; I learn various things; and I note the various tastes and different fancies of men. In the meantime comes the hour to dine, when I eat with my company what food this poor villa and tiny patrimony allow. Having eaten, I return to the inn; there is the host, ordinarily a butcher, a miller, two bakers. With them I become a rascal for the whole day, playing at *cricca* and *tric-trac*, from which arise a thousand quarrels and countless abuses with insulting words, and most times we are fighting over a penny and yet we can be heard shouting from San Casciano. Thus involved with these vermin I scrape the mold off my brain and I satisfy the malignity of this fate of mine, as I am content to be trampled on this path so as to see if she will be ashamed of it.

After this day of trivial events, Machiavelli turns to serious thought:

> When evening has come, I return to my house and go into my study. At the door I take off my clothes of the day, covered with mud and mire, and I put on my regal and courtly garments; and decently reclothed, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them lovingly, I feed on the food that alone is mine and that I was born for. There I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their humanity reply to me. *And for the space of four hours I feel no boredom, I forget every pain, I do not fear poverty, death does not frighten me. I deliver myself entirely to them.*[28]

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As Machiavelli goes on to explain, his nocturnal dialogue with the past bore lasting fruit.

> And because Dante says that to have understood without retaining does not make knowledge,[29] I have noted what capital I have made from their conversation and have *composed a little work* De Principatibus (On Principalities) *where I delve as deeply as I can into reflections on this subject, debating what a principality is, of what kinds they are, how they are acquired, how they are maintained, why they are lost.* And if you have ever been pleased by any of my whimsies,[30] this one should not displease you; and to a prince, and especially to a new prince, it should be welcome. So *I am addressing it to his Magnificence, Giuliano.*[31] Filippo Cassavecchia has seen it; he can give you an account in part both of the thing in itself and of the discussions I had with him, although I am all the time fattening and polishing it.

In addition to a vivid image of Machiavelli's daily life, here we have a specific discussion of his most famous work, albeit with a different title (*De Principatibus*, or *On Principalities*, rather than *Il Principe* as the work is known to us) and a different addressee.[32] After describing the work we know as *The Prince*, Machiavelli turns to Vettori's invitation to join him in Rome:

> You wish, magnificent ambassador, that I leave this life and come to enjoy your life with you. I will do it in any case, but what tempts me now is certain dealings of mine that I will have done in six weeks.[33] What makes me be doubtful is that the Soderini are there, whom I would be forced, if I came, to visit and speak with. *I should fear that at my return I would not expect to get off at my house, but I would get off at the Bargello*,[34] for although this state has very great foundations and great security, yet it is new, and because of this suspicious; nor does it lack wiseacres who, to appear like Pagolo Bertini, would let others run up a bill and leave me to think of paying. I beg of you to relieve me of this fear, and

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then I will come in the time stated to meet you anyway.

I have discussed with Filippo this little work of mine, whether to give it to him or not; and if it is good to give it, whether it would be good for me to take it or send it to you. Not giving it would make me fear that at the least it would not be read by Giuliano and that this Ardinghelli would take for himself the honor of this latest effort of mine.[35] The necessity that chases me makes me give it, because I am becoming worn out, and I cannot remain as I am for a long time without becoming despised because of poverty, besides the desire I have that these Medici lords begin to make use of me even if they should begin by making me roll a stone. For if I should not then win them over to me, I should complain of myself; and through this thing, if it were read, one would see that I have neither slept through nor played away the fifteen years I have been at the study of the art of the state. And anyone should be glad to have the service of one who is full of experience at the expense of another. And one should not doubt my faith, because having always observed faith, I ought not now be learning to break it. Whoever has been faithful and good for forty-three years, as I have, ought not to be able to change his nature, and of my faith and goodness my poverty is witness.

This discussion of Machiavelli's intention in writing *The Prince* obviously requires some consideration in deciding how to read the book.

The famous letter to Vettori reminds us of a number of things, each of which is germane to the questions with which we began:

- In December 1513, Machiavelli still feared a repetition of his imprisonment and torture earlier in the year and, for this reason, did not wish to initiate any political action in his own name. Because Soderini was alive and in Rome, moreover, Machiavelli did not feel he could accept Vettori's invitation to go there lest he be immediately

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arrested on his return to Florence. At the time of writing *The Prince*, Machiavelli had very good reasons to be exceedingly circumspect.

- Although Machiavelli disliked his absence from power, and feared the loss of reputation due to poverty, during his evening studies of the ancients, Machiavelli says: “I feel no boredom, I forget every pain, I do not fear poverty, death does not frighten me. I deliver myself entirely to them.” Despite his emphatic preference for the active life of politics, Machiavelli was no stranger to scholarship and knew its unique pleasures.[36]
- Machiavelli sought—and openly said he sought—employment from the Medici. But the letter to Vettori hardly proves that his decision to seek a position was an attempt to exercise power at all costs rather than a device to guarantee his immunity from the “chance events” of torture, imprisonment, and possible death.[37] Indeed, Machiavelli’s willingness to accept any position (“even if they should begin by making me roll a stone”) could be interpreted as a tactic of self-defense, designed more to gain “favor” and avoid being “despised” than to exercise power and influence.
- Although Machiavelli describes the manuscript as addressed to Giuliano de’ Medici, he explicitly treats the question of whether or not to send it to him as a matter of discussion and prudence. Not only did he discuss the idea with Filippo Cassavecchia and ask Vettori’s advice, but his own justification is external “necessity” (not the logic of his argument).
- Machiavelli’s book about “what a principality is, of what kinds they are, how they are acquired, how they are maintained, why they are lost” was originally entitled *De Principatibus* (*On Principalities*), a title retained at the head of chapter one of our editions. As we know, the

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manuscript that was published after Machiavelli's death[38] is called *Il Principe* or *The Prince* (with the title in Italian rather than Latin), and is dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici[39] (rather than to Giuliano). Since Machiavelli seems to have left this work to be published, with some important changes introduced after December 1513,[40] his intention in writing cannot be limited to the circumstance of his desire for and need of political employment.

While Machiavelli's correspondence at the time of writing *The Prince* and beginning the *Discourses* does not settle the question of how to interpret his major works, it provides valuable evidence on several critical points. Machiavelli had a self-interest in writing in a devious or deceptive manner.[41] And if we can believe his subsequent assertion to Guiccardini, Machiavelli actually admitted to this practice: "if indeed sometimes I do happen to tell the truth, I hide it among so many lies that it is hard to find." Of the three requisites for discovering a meaning "between the lines" of a serious book, historical evidence provides indications of the first (the possibility was known and there was reason to use it) and the third (the author left some indication in private correspondence that is consistent with the existence of a "hidden intention"). It remains to turn to the final criterion, emphasized by Rousseau: are there contradictions or confusions in Machiavelli's texts that can only be understood on the assumption that the author was intentionally devious? Do these contradictions justify an interpretation of *The Prince* that departs sharply from the conventional understanding of Machiavelli as an amoral exponent of power politics and an apologist of the prince's use of force and deceit?

***III*. The Discourses on Titus Livy *and* The Prince**

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That *The Prince* is somehow a deceptive book can be inferred from a number of puzzles. I have noted that, in 1513, Machiavelli himself gave it a different title (*On Principalities*) which has survived as the inner title, just before chapter one. Other puzzles abound. Why, in a book written in Italian, did the author use Latin chapter headings? Who is meant by the direct addressee ("you"), sometimes given in the singular ("Tu") and sometimes in the plural ("Voi")? More broadly, for whom was the book written?

The question of the addressee of *The Prince* is made explicit by its Dedicatory Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, headed in Latin (*Nicolaus Maclavellus ad Magnificum Lavrentium Medicem*). Since the younger Lorenzo, nephew of Pope Leo X, had died in 1519, why did Machiavelli leave this dedication in the manuscript, and why did his literary heirs publish it when the book finally appeared in 1532? To be sure, Lorenzo's uncle Giuliano, to whom Machiavelli thought of addressing the manuscript in 1513, died in 1516. This would imply that Machiavelli revised his manuscript between 1516 and 1519, and then left it unchanged during the last nine years of his life.[42] Machiavelli does not seem to have changed *The Prince* after 1520, the date of manuscript copies written by his friend Biagio Buonaccorsi.[43] Whatever the reason for changing the addressee from Giuliano to Lorenzo, the meaning of the published work seems somehow related to this dedication.

To resolve the puzzle, it is well to focus on the text with some care. Machiavelli begins the Dedicatory Letter to *The Prince* by citing conventional proprieties:

> It is *customary most of the time* for those who desire to acquire favor with a Prince to come to meet him with things that they care most for among their own or with things that they see please him most. Thus one sees them many times being presented with horses, arms, cloth of gold, precious stones and similar ornaments worthy of their greatness. Thus, since I desire to offer myself to

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> your Magnificence with some testimony of my homage to you, *I have found nothing in my belongings that I care so much for and esteem so greatly as the knowledge of the actions of great men, learned by me from long experience with modern things and a continuous reading of ancient ones*. (*Prince*, Dedicatory Letter; p. 3)

Machiavelli seeks favor with Lorenzo de' Medici. He follows the custom of offering a prince valued things. But between the two types of gift—those valued by the prince himself (things that "please him") or those valued by the givers (things the givers "care most for among their own")—Machiavelli chooses a gift based on his own standards of value ("I have found nothing in my belongings that I care so much for and esteem so greatly").

Are we to interpret this offer at face value? Rousseau suggests that *The Prince* be contrasted to the *Discourses on Titus Livy*, a work which also begins with a dedicatory letter. Because the *Discourses* seem to be mentioned at the beginning of chapter two of *The Prince*, and both works were published posthumously, it is not far-fetched to assume that Machiavelli himself wanted us to compare them. That suspicion is underlined by the sharp contrast between the Dedicatory Letters to the two works.

The *Discourses* are dedicated not to one man, but to two: "Niccolò Machiavelli to Zanobi Buondelmonti and Cosimo Rucellai, Greeting." In this Dedicatory Letter, Machiavelli quite directly criticizes the practice of dedicating books to a ruler:

> when I reflect on the many mistakes I may have made in other circumstances, I know that I have made no mistake at any rate in this, that I have chosen to dedicate these my discourses to you in preference to all others; both because, in doing so, I seem to be showing some gratitude for benefits received, and also because I seem in this to be *departing from the usual practice of authors, which has always been to dedicate their works to some prince,*

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> *and, blinded by ambition and avarice, to praise him for all his virtuous qualities when they ought to have blamed him for all manner of shameful deeds. (Discourses*, Dedicatory Letter; pp. 94–95)[44]

Was the dedication to *The Prince* merely a "mistake," due to a moment in which Machiavelli was "blinded by ambition and avarice"? Or are we intended to contrast the two Dedicatory Letters and, thereby, gain a perspective on the devious nature of Machiavelli's intention?

It might seem that we are intended to treat the *Discourses on Titus Livy* as Machiavelli's definitive work: "For in it I have set down *all that I know and have learnt from a long experience of, and from constantly reading about, political affairs*" (ibid.). In contrast, *The Prince* is as it were the short course in Machiavelli's political thought:

> I have found nothing in my belongings that I care so much for and esteem so greatly as the knowledge of the actions of great men, learned by me from long experience with modern things and a continuous reading of ancient ones. Having thought out and examined these things with diligence for a long time, and *now reduced them to one small volume*, I send it to your Magnificence. (*Prince*, Dedicatory Letter; p. 3)

There is no indication that *The Prince* is less reliable than the *Discourses*—merely that it would give Lorenzo "the capacity to be able *to understand in a very short time all that I have learned and understood* in so many years and with so many hardships and dangers for myself" (ibid.).

In dedicating *The Prince* to Lorenzo, Machiavelli then refers explicitly to his intention—but does so in a deliberately ambiguous way:

> Therefore, your Magnificence, take this small gift in the spirit

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(*animo*) with which I send it. If your Magnificence considers and reads it diligently, you will learn from it my extreme desire that *you arrive at the greatness that fortune and your other qualities promise you*. (*Prince*, Dedicatory Letter; p. 4)[45]

But what is "the greatness that fortune" and Lorenzo's "other qualities promise" at the time Machiavelli is presumed to have written these lines, between 1516 and 1519?[46]

IV. Machiavelli's Intention in The Prince

Few interpreters of *The Prince* go beyond the surface meaning of Machiavelli's offer to work for the Medici. But there seems to be some kind of puzzle in the dedication. This puzzle is by no means limited to the contradictory implications of the dedication to the *Discourses*. On the contrary, one finds even greater difficulties within the text of *The Prince* itself.

If Machiavelli intended Lorenzo to understand "in a very short time all that I have learned and understood," then presumably he meant for Lorenzo to understand the dangers of flattery from those who follow the customary behavior of "*those who desire to acquire favor with a Prince*." It therefore seems reasonable to consider Machiavelli's dedication in the light of the discussion of flattery in *The Prince* (ch. 23).[47] In that discussion, Machiavelli points out that every ruler confronts a basic problem because advisors need to know "that they do not offend you in telling you the truth; but when everyone can tell you the truth, they lack reverence for you."[48]

The ubiquitous problem of getting good advice can be solved, Machiavelli suggests, by adopting the following strategy:

Therefore, *a prudent prince* must hold to a third mode, *choosing wise men in his state*; and only to these should he give freedom to speak the truth to him, and *of those things only that he asks about*

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> *and nothing else*. . . . A prince, therefore, should always take counsel, but *when he wants*, and not when others want it; on the contrary, he should discourage everyone from counseling him about anything *unless he asks it of them*. (*Prince*, ch. 23; pp. 94–95)

In two different places in this chapter, Machiavelli emphatically notes that princes should reject unsolicited advice. Yet the Dedicatory Letter—and the book as a whole—offers unsolicited advice. And, as chapter twenty-three of *The Prince* points out, a prince who would accept such advice "either *falls headlong because of flatterers* or changes often because of the variability of views, from which *a low estimation of him arises*" (ibid.).

The teaching of *The Prince* itself suggests that its Dedicatory Letter is some kind of trap. Were the Medici to give Machiavelli a position of influence, this act itself would contradict the "mode that never fails" in determining "how a prince can know his minister":

> When you see a minister thinking more of himself than of you, and in all actions looking for something useful to himself, one so made will never be a good minister; never will you be able to trust him. (*Prince*, ch. 22; p. 93)

Machiavelli apparently offers his services because he needs a job; his choice of a gift to please Lorenzo is explicitly based on the standards of the donor, not those of the recipient. If Lorenzo, to whom *The Prince* is dedicated, had indeed given its author a position as advisor, he would demonstrate that he lacks prudence.

Such a conclusion is important because, as Machiavelli goes on to point out, the relationship between a ruler and his advisors is crucial;

> For this is a *general rule that never fails*: that a prince who is not

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> wise by himself cannot be counseled well, unless indeed by chance he should submit himself to one person alone to govern him in everything, who is a very prudent man. In this case he could well be, but it would not last long because that *governor would in a short time take away his state*. (*Prince*, ch. 23; p. 95)[49]

If the addressee of *The Prince* accepts Machiavelli's advice and gives him employment, he will either be badly advised or—having turned all power over to his advisor—lose power to him.

For today's reader, these contradictions suggest a need to reconsider Machiavelli's intention. Machiavelli allowed the text of *The Prince* to circulate among friends and left it to be published posthumously. For us, if not for Lorenzo, the Dedicatory Letter needs to be read as some kind of instruction, rather than as a request for a job that is to be taken literally. What, then, was Machiavelli's purpose?

V. Machiavelli's Intention: Writing at Multiple Levels

The puzzle of Machiavelli's intentions is clarified by his own statement in the matter. In chapter fifteen of *The Prince*, he tells us flatly about "my intent." Although the passage is well known, it bears careful rereading in the light of what has just been noted.

> It remains now to see what the modes and government of a prince should be with subjects and with friends. And because I know that many have written of this, I fear that in writing of it again, I may be held presumptuous, especially since *in disputing this matter I depart from the orders of others*. But since *my intent is to write something useful to whoever understands it*, it has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it. (p. 61)

Machiavelli's addressee is "whoever understands" his work. His

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intention is to be "useful" to such a person. And this utility is directly associated with Machiavelli's novelty.[50]

It would seem that Machiavelli did indeed write deviously, and that his deception was somehow related to his innovation. In the *Discourses*, he claims that "impelled by the natural desire I have *always* had to labour, regardless of anything, on that which I believe to be *for the common benefit of all*, I have decided to enter upon a new way, as yet untrodden by anyone else" (*Discourses*, I, Pref.; p. 97).[51] If we credit this bold assertion, Machiavelli's labors in writing *The Prince* were also "for the common benefit of all."

Somehow that common good requires acts of deception (cf. *Discourses*, II, 13). But was Machiavelli aware of the tradition of writing to deceive? Can we credit him with such "Machiavellian" deviousness? Consider Machiavelli's famous remark on the distinction between laws ("proper to man") and force (the characteristic of "beasts"):

> it is necessary for a prince to know well how to use the beast and the man. This role was *taught covertly to princes by ancient writers*, who wrote that Achilles, and many other princes, were given to Chiron the centaur to be raised. To have as teacher a half-beast, half-man means nothing other than that a prince needs to know how to use both natures. (*Prince*, ch. 18; p. 69)

Machiavelli not only knows about devious or "esoteric" writing; he asserts that "ancient writers" used this technique to teach princes.[52] Insofar as his own work is directed to potential or actual rulers, is it impossible that he would teach "covertly"?

Earlier, I suggested three criteria that need to be met before we can say with some plausibility that a writer used the device of indirect or deceptive communication.

- First, the historical and social context needs to create a reason for using this method—and, as a former official of

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the Florentine Republic suspected of seeking the overthrow of the Medici, Machiavelli's context provided ample enough reason.

- Second, the published texts should contain contradictions or puzzles that seem impossible to resolve without concluding that, unless the author was a fool, these passages point to partially hidden meanings—and such puzzles are evident if we contrast the dedication of *The Prince* with that of the *Discourses* or with the text of *The Prince* itself.
- And finally, the author should indicate that he is aware of this technique—and, even without knowing his emphatic statement to this effect in his correspondence, Machiavelli's knowledge of this method is demonstrated by the explicit reference to "covert" writing in ancient thought (*Prince*, ch. 18).

In reading *The Prince*, we should indeed take seriously Rousseau's assertion that Machiavelli has a "hidden intention."

It follows that Machiavelli's claim for novelty must also be taken very seriously. But if Machiavelli actually did articulate "a new way, as yet untrodden by anyone" (*Discourses*, I, Pref.; p. 93), he discovered something in his experience and his studies that was entirely new.[53] Machiavelli thus must claim to have a "brain" that "understands by itself"—the highest kind of intelligence, which is "very excellent" (*Prince*, ch. 22; p. 92). In short, Machiavelli quietly implies that his theory is a rival to anything humans have ever thought, be it in the realm of philosophy as exemplified by Socrates and the traditions elaborated by Plato, Xenophon, and Lucretius, or of religion as exemplified by Jesus and the tradition elaborated by St. Paul, St. Augustine, or St. Thomas Aquinas.

At first, of course, it appears that Machiavelli is only concerned with politics in the narrow sense. But on important occasions, he will explicitly refer to other "philosophers" and

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"answer" their arguments (e.g., *Discourses*, II, 5; p. 288). Machiavelli's hesitancy in talking about the philosophic contemplation he describes so movingly in the letter to Vettori may itself be based on principle, for in the *Florentine Histories* he speaks of a political and moral cycle of history in which philosophy and letters play a corrupting role:

> it has been observed by the prudent that letters come after arms and that, in provinces and cities, captains arise before philosophers. For, as good and ordered armies give birth to victories and victories to quiet, *the strength of well-armed spirits cannot be corrupted by a more honorable leisure than that of letters*, nor can leisure enter into well-instituted cities with *a greater and more dangerous deceit than this one*. This was best understood by Cato when the philosophers Diogenes and Carneades, sent by Athens as spokesmen to the Senate, came to Rome. When he saw how the Roman youth was beginning to follow them about with admiration, and *since he recognized the evil that could result to his fatherland from this honorable leisure, he saw to it that no philosopher could be accepted in Rome.* (*Florentine Histories*, V, 1; p. 185)

Philosophy—which in Machiavelli's time included "natural philosophy" or science—is "honorable" but "dangerous," and should be prohibited in "well-instituted cities." That Machiavelli is generally silent on his own philosophical or scientific pretensions could, then, be part of a carefully worked out transformation of all prior thought.[54]

Deceptive or so-called "esoteric" writing might be not only necessary as a means to prevent difficulty with the Medici, but prudent for deeper reasons. Many other philosophers, not to mention some religious traditions, have practiced "covert" instruction when it is assumed that public or open teaching would have negative effects.[55] But how is one to know the meaning of a text written in this manner? Isn't it an invitation to

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the commentator's whimsy and self-interest to move away from the plain meaning of the text?

The answer can best be stated by listing some of the means for drafting a written text that is likely to be read by the censors or rulers of a hostile regime (Machiavelli's situation in Florence when he wrote *The Prince*). One or more of the following devices are available to get around censorship:

- Include many details, especially at the outset of the argument. Censors are easily bored.
- Make an orthodox or inoffensive general statement, which you do not believe, then later qualify it with an exception that makes your point. Censors are usually lazy and will not go beyond first impressions; if they do, you always have the excuse of the general statement.
- Use words with an unexpected or inverted meaning, much as teenagers call desirable things "terrible" or "awful." Censors will be confused and not bother to figure out the reason.
- Introduce a problem with an ambiguous discussion which is only clarified later; your intended reader will go through the text more than once to be sure your meaning is grasped, whereas the censor is only likely to read through once.
- Present allegories or comparisons that have an obvious point and a less visible implication. Better yet, make two different comparisons to the same thing, and leave it to your reader to work out the implications. The censor will never bother.
- Contradict yourself from time to time and leave it to the intended reader—who goes through the text more than once—to figure out why you have done so. The censor will conclude you are confused.

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To be sure, great care is needed when reading in this manner. For that reason, I will focus specifically on *The Prince*, in order to show how reading it as a "covert" teaching of "princes" leads to an understanding of Machiavelli's thought. Other works can then be used to contradict my interpretation. In this way, the proposed reading of *The Prince* will function as an hypothesis, with the evidence to confirm or disconfirm it being Machiavelli's other writings and his political experience.

What, then, is the "new way" that led Machiavelli to "depart from the orders of others"? How does Machiavelli's understanding of human nature, based on "long experience with modern things and a continuous reading of ancient ones" (*Prince*, Dedicatory Letter; p. 3), differ from the perspective of both Christianity and pagan antiquity? Before we can use Machiavelli as a touchstone for understanding the findings of contemporary science, we need to restate his theories clearly and succinctly. It is to that task that the next chapter is devoted.

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Chapter Three

Machiavelli's Science of Human Nature

I am Machevill . . . And hold there is no sin but ignorance.

Christopher Marlowe[1]

In order to reconsider Machiavelli's thought in the light of contemporary science, it is first necessary to understand what he meant to teach us. In the last chapter, I sought to establish that Machiavelli is a serious political thinker who had reason to write with what Rousseau called a "hidden intention." Although many scholars in recent times have criticized the method of reading associated with deceptive or so-called "esoteric" writing, historical evidence indicates that after his imprisonment and torture, Machiavelli had good reasons to hide his opinions. I have argued that when Machiavelli himself points out how "ancient writers" taught princes "covertly," he is suggesting *The Prince* should be studied as a book with a covert meaning. In fact, I have tried to show that any other approach to the text leads either to hopeless confusion or to the conclusion that Machiavelli is not a major thinker whose theories could claim to be true.

The evidence that Machiavelli wrote in a devious manner does not, however, itself demonstrate that he had a coherent or systematic theory of human nature and politics. Because Machiavelli so openly endorses republican regimes in the *Discourses*, if he is consistent, *The Prince* must also contain a republican political teaching despite its

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superficial endorsement of autocratic princely rule. To discover Machiavelli's meaning, therefore, it will be necessary to show that a consistent philosophical teaching underlies the apparently diverse perspectives set forth in his works.

Because *The Prince* seems to be addressed to a particular individual under specific circumstances, is it appropriate to focus the restatement of Machiavelli's general understanding of human nature and politics on this work? There are at least three main reasons for doing so: First, any interpretation of Machiavelli that is not based on *The Prince* could be challenged on the grounds, so often used by commentators, that he changed his mind from one work to another. If Machiavelli wrote in a devious or "covert" manner, hiding a consistent philosophical position in diverse messages, we should be able to understand his theory by focusing on a single text, rereading passages with more care than a supporter of the Medici might have done in 1513. Second, in the intellectual and political history of the West, *The Prince* has been Machiavelli's most influential work. Since many commentators focus on the question of whether Machiavelli sought to restore ancient pagan traditions, reflected his times, or was the first "modern," it seems reasonable to focus on the work that is most likely to have played a role in the emergence of modernity.[2] Finally, because *The Prince* has become Machiavelli's best-known work, most of those familiar with the Western intellectual tradition will have read the book; hence a careful reading of *The Prince* provides the most convenient way to reconsider Machiavelli's theory in the light of contemporary knowledge of human behavior.

These arguments also imply that if Machiavelli did have a coherent theory, it is presented in different ways in his various writings. In effect, Machiavelli introduces each of the major works as giving a specific perspective on human affairs. If we are to understand *The Prince* and its relation to his thought as a whole, it will be necessary to bear in mind Machiavelli's explicit description of the intended audience or point of view that is elaborated in some other writings:

- The *Discourses on Titus Livy* is the most extensive presentation of Machiavelli's teaching, directed to "those who know how to govern a kingdom" and who, "on account of their innumerable

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good qualities, deserve to be" princes or rulers.[3] Because it is to explore all human political life, both ancient (pagan) and modern (Christian), the *Discourses* focus on the greatest regime known to have existed: republican Rome.

- The *Florentine Histories* focus on the relationship between domestic and foreign policy in a single human community, a perspective that is "useful to the citizens who govern republics." Because Machiavelli is himself a citizen of Florence, the *Histories* focus on his native city, but it is intended to be "understood in all times."[4]
- *The Prince* emphasizes the founder or legislator who, like Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, or Romulus, established "altogether new principalities" or regimes (*Prince*, ch. 6; pp. 21–25). Although each of these leaders was "a man rising newly" whose honor came from "the new laws and the new orders found by him,"[5] *The Prince* also explores—and is dedicated to—the ruler who, like Cesare Borgia, seeks to achieve his ends through "fortune and the arms of others" rather than "virtue and his own arms" (*Prince*, ch. 7; pp. 25–33).
- *The Art of War* presents in dialogue form the teaching of *The Prince* (chs. 12–14) and *Discourses* (Book II, esp. chs. 16–18) concerning the "good arms" required in any lasting state as "defenses" of "all the arts that are provided for in a state for the sake of the common good of man."[6] Since Machiavelli's own experience in Florentine politics was centered on military and diplomatic matters—and since he saw to it that this work was published in his own lifetime—the tendency to ignore *The Art of War* may be a reflection of scholarly bias. Attention to this work is especially important if one is to understand Machiavelli's novel analysis of the emerging political transformations due to artillery and other new military technology.[7]
- As I will suggest at the end of this chapter, even the *Mandragola*, Machiavelli's famous comedy, fits this pattern—presenting his teaching in a form that would lead the general "audience" or common people to "understand a new case born in this city" and to be "tricked" as Lucrezia is in the play.[8]

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While my restatement of Machiavelli's principles is based on *The Prince*, it will therefore take into consideration these other works.

I. Human Nature and Power

From the outset of *The Prince*, we are told that human things look different depending on one's point of view:

> For just as those who sketch landscapes place themselves down in the plain to consider the nature of mountains and high places and to consider the nature of low places place themselves high atop mountains, similarly, *to know well the nature of peoples one needs to be prince, and to know well the nature of princes one needs to be of the people*. (*The Prince*, Dedicatory Letter; p. 4)

The diversity of perspectives in Machiavelli's works, which I have claimed is crucial to understanding his thought, therefore reflects a basic problem in human affairs—namely the tendency for one's judgment to be influenced by one's point of view or situation.

In comparing himself to "those who sketch landscapes," Machiavelli may have had a specific artist in mind. In the first chapter, it was shown that Leonardo da Vinci was serving as military architect for Cesare Borgia when the Florentine Republic sent Machiavelli to Cesare's court in 1502, and that after Leonardo's return to Florence in 1503, Machiavelli sent Leonardo on several technical missions of great importance. In addition, Machiavelli played a role in negotiating the terms for Leonardo's painting of a large fresco in the Palazzo della Signoria of Florence, the famous *Battle of Anghiari*.[9]

The possibility that Machiavelli as author of *The Prince* is comparing himself to the artist Leonardo da Vinci is suggested by a passage in the latter's *Treatise on Painting*: "The painter is lord of all types of peoples and of all things. If he wants valleys, if he wants from high mountain tops to unfold a great plain extending down to the sea's horizon, he is lord to do so; and likewise if from low plains he wishes to see high mountains."[10] While this parallel between the

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description of "those who sketch landscapes" by Leonardo and Machiavelli might be accidental, further evidence that Leonardo's thought and writings influenced Machiavelli will be noted below. As a result, it is worth reflecting for a moment on the implications of Leonardo's view of the landscape painter.

In the passage of the *Treatise on Painting* just cited, Leonardo goes on to add that the multiplicity of perspectives makes possible "a proportioned and harmonious view of the whole, that can be seen simultaneously, at one glance, just as things in nature."[11] By his ability to imagine a scene from more than one angle, moreover, Leonardo created an "aerial perspective" which transcends the distinction between mountain top and plains;[12] among examples of this new technique are the background of the *Mona Lisa* (Fig. 3.1) and maps that "seem to have been drawn from the air, as if Leonardo had been able to construct and pilot aloft his flying machine."[13] It is likely that Machiavelli knew of this perspective from the maps portraying the site of the Florentines' attempt to rechannel the Arno, since he seems to have used Leonardo's map to critique the plan adopted by Colombino (cf. Figures 1.6, 1.11, and 3.2).[14] Does Machiavelli's comparison of his writing with the work of "those who sketch landscapes" imply the claim to understand human life from an olympian or god-like detachment?

As a former statesman reduced to private life due to "a great and continuous malignity of fortune," Machiavelli has experienced both the perspective of power and that of the common "people." Like Leonardo's painter, who can present "a proportioned and harmonious view of the whole," Machiavelli's unusual capacity to see things from different points of view gives him a deeper knowledge of human nature than others, and especially than a hereditary ruler.[15] Machiavelli can therefore claim he understands the nature of both common men and rulers—and thus has a more inclusive perspective than either taken alone.[16]

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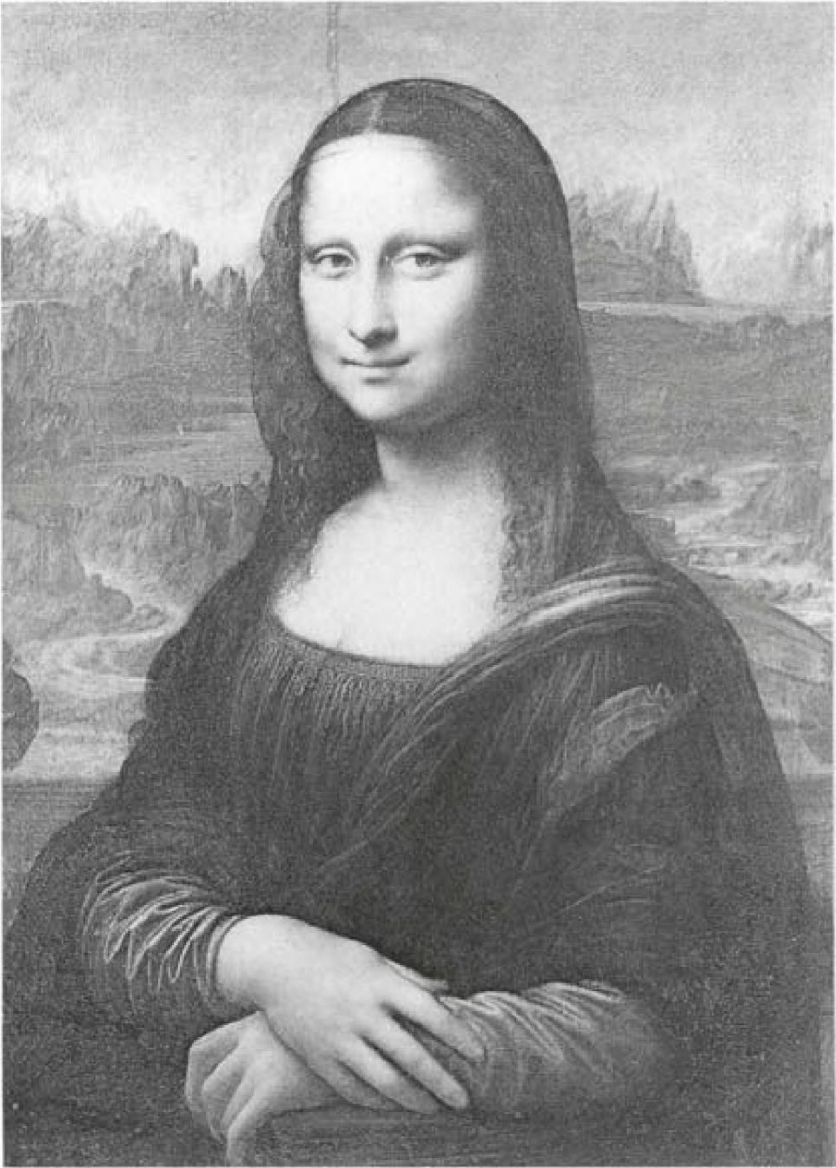

Figure 3.1. Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa* (c. 1505–1513), oil on wood panel, 30 x 20 7/8 inches (77 x 53 cm). Courtesy of Musée du Louvre, Paris. Note the aerial perspective used for the background, creating the illusion that the figure of Mona Lisa is floating in the air.

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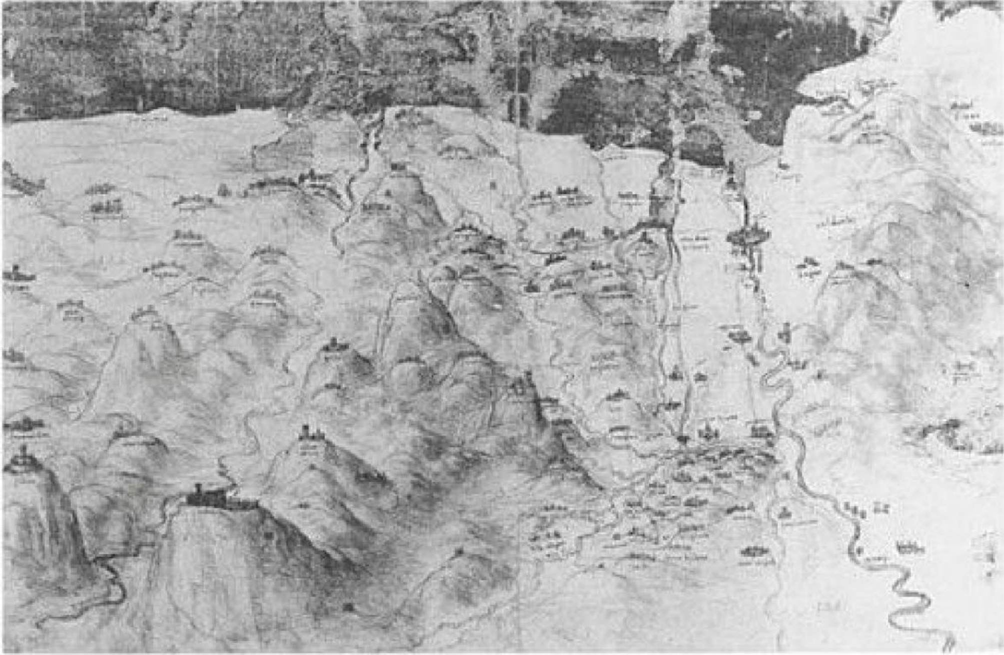

Figure 3.2. Leonardo da Vinci, Bird's Eye View of Part of Tuscany (c. 1502–1503), pen, ink, and watercolor, 10 7/8 x 15 7/8 inches (27.5 x 40.1 cm). Windsor Castle, Royal Library 12683. Courtesy of The Royal Collection © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

As if to underscore the importance of multiple perspectives for gaining general knowledge of political life, Machiavelli uses the grammatical device of direct address ("you"), sometimes shifting from singular to plural without apparent reason in a way that many commentators have found puzzling.[17] Consider how Machiavelli presents one of his broadest descriptions of human nature:

> For one can say this generally of men: that they are ungrateful, fickle, pretenders and dissemblers, evaders of danger, eager for gain. While *you do them good, they are yours, offering you their blood, property, lives, and children, as I said above*, when the need for them is far away; but *when it is close to you, they revolt*. (*Prince*, ch. 17; p. 66)

As a general rule, humans are unreliable or selfish. From the

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perspective of the prince or ruler, this disembodied perspective means that offers of support only last as long as "*you* do them good" and do not prevent "*them*" from rebelling in the time of need.

In this passage, "you" is the singular and familiar *Tu*.[18] Since elsewhere Machiavelli often uses the impersonal point of view when speaking about the prince,[19] such direct address, as if Machiavelli were talking personally to a ruler like Lorenzo de' Medici or Cesare Borgia, connotes a *perspective*, not a *subject matter*. Thus the earlier passage to which Machiavelli refers in chapter seventeen ("as I said before") seems to be in chapter nine, which makes the same substantive point with different pronouns:

> For such a prince [a prince "about to ascend from a civil order to an absolute one" who governs "by means of magistrates"] cannot found himself on what he sees in quiet times, *when citizens have need of the state, because then everyone runs, everyone promises, and each wants to die for him when death is at a distance; but in adverse times, when the state has need of citizens, then few of them are to be found*. (p. 42)

This passage corresponds to the formula in chapter seventeen, but uses "him" rather than "you" to describe the situation of the Medici in Florence, in which princes seek to transform a republic ("civic order") to absolute rule but rule with the aid of magistrates.[20]

The ability to see things from the perspective of either the common people or the prince thus permits Machiavelli to understand human nature in a more general way than either. This means, however, that any specific statement needs to be qualified by its context. Earlier in chapter nine, for example, Machiavelli seems to contradict the general rule about the fickle nature of the people which occurs later in that chapter and is restated in chapter seventeen.

> He who comes to the principality with the aid of the great maintains himself with more difficulty than one who becomes prince with the aid of the people . . . And let no one resist my opinion on this with that trite proverb, that whoever founds on the people founds on mud. For that is true when a private citizen lays his foundation on them, and allows himself to think that the people will liberate him if he is oppressed by enemies or by the magistrates . . . But *when a prince who founds on the*

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> *people knows how to command and is a man full of heart*, does not get frightened in adversity, does not fail to make other preparations, and with his spirit and his orders keeps the generality of people inspired, *he will never find himself deceived by them and he will see he has laid his foundations well*. (*Prince*, ch. 9; pp. 39, 41)

The "general" rule of human unreliability applies to private citizens, and to princes who seek to establish absolute rule or to rule with the aid of the aristocrats or nobles (the "great"); it does not apply to a prince who "knows how to command and is a man full of heart." If such a ruler bases his power on the people, "he will *never* find himself deceived by them."

On the surface, Machiavelli teaches that humans are generally unreliable and selfish—and so they are. But he also gives us examples of princes whose survival depended on extraordinary faithfulness and courage on the part of the people. In chapter nine, he cites "Nabis, prince of the Spartans" as one who "withstood a siege by all Greece and by one of Rome's most victorious armies, and defended his fatherland and his state against them" (p. 41).[21] Agathocles the Sicilian was able to "live for a long time secure in his fatherland, defend himself against external enemies, and never be conspired against by his citizens" (*Prince*, ch. 7; p. 37).[22] Since both of these rulers are elsewhere described as "tyrants," the point is not that human nature is inherently or usually good or virtuous in the traditional sense. Rather, Machiavelli seems to be emphasizing a diversity or malleability that depends on individuals and circumstances.

Because humans are generally selfish, it is a mistake to *rely* on goodness: "a man who wants to make a profession of good in all regards must come to ruin *among so many who are not good"* (*Prince*, ch. 15; p. 61). But human nature itself is variable in at least two important ways. Some individuals are good, brave, or faithful by "nature." And in some situations, most or all people can be led to behave in ways that are good—though to do so requires a political art, the creation of "good laws and good arms" by effective political leaders. As Machiavelli puts it explicitly, "the nature of peoples is variable" (*Prince*, ch. 6; p. 24).

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That individuals differ by "nature" as well as by "nurture" is implied by the twin requirements of the successful ruler who bases his power on the people because he "*knows how to command and is a man full of heart*" (cited above). While the knowledge may depend on instruction, it would seem that bravery or "spirit" is a personal characteristic of a different order. People "proceed variously: one with caution, the other with impetuosity; one with violence, the other with art; one with patience, the other with its contrary" (*Prince*, ch. 25; p. 99). Elsewhere, with regard to himself Machiavelli speaks of "the *natural desire* I have *always* had to labour . . . on that which I believe to be for the common benefit of all" (*Discourses*, I, Pref.; p. 97), and comments that "whoever has been faithful and good for forty-three years, as I have, ought *not to be able to change his nature*" (letter to Vettori, Appendix II). As observation confirms, it is often the case that a man "cannot deviate from what *nature inclines him to" (Prince*, ch. 25; p. 100).[23]

In an important chapter of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli explains the political importance of these differences, which we would describe as matters of "personality" or "temperament."

> For one sees that in what they do some men are impetuous, others look about them and are cautious; and that, since in both cases they go to extremes and are unable to go about things in the right way, in both cases they make mistakes. On the other hand, he is likely to make fewer mistakes and to prosper in his fortune when circumstances accord with his conduct, as I have said, and *one always proceeds as the force of nature compels one*. (*Discourses*, III, 9; p. 430)

Good fortune or success is often a matter of the accidental "conformity" between a person's "behavior" and "the times"; indeed, this is one of the major advantages of leadership in "a republic" in which there are "*diverse citizens with diverse dispositions*" (ibid., pp. 430–431).[24]

In addition to individual differences among humans, social circumstances change. What Machiavelli calls the "variability of the good" arises because the "quality of the times" changes (ibid., pp. 99–100). Human nature is thus malleable to the degree that the

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natural selfishness and shortsightedness of most people can be overcome. Such successful manipulation of human nature is particular illustrated by "*the highly virtuous actions performed in ancient kingdoms and republics*, by their kings, their generals, their citizens, their legislators, and by others who have gone to the trouble of serving their country" (*Discourses*, I, Pref.; p. 98).[25] But what Machiavelli calls "human conditions" do not permit rulers either to rely on the goodness of their subjects, or to be good themselves in every respect (*Prince*, ch. 15; p. 61). The result is that "great variability of things which have been seen and are seen every day, beyond human conjecture" which most people describe as "fortune" or chance (*Prince*, ch. 25; p. 98).

Human nature is thus characterized by selfishness and shortsightedness, by ambition and conflict, but also sometimes by knowledge and bravery, by virtue and devotion to the common good. The consequence is a world of change and unpredictability. In many matters, it is not possible to have fixed rules of conduct because of the diversity and complexity of situations. As a result, for example, a "prince can gain the people to himself in many modes, for which one cannot give certain rules because the modes vary according to circumstances" (*Prince*, ch. 9; pp. 40–41).

II. Fortune, History, and the State

Because of the "variability of things" produced by the differences in human character and the frequent propensity to selfishness, it is difficult to predict the outcome of events. As a consequence,

> many have held and hold *the opinion that worldly things are so governed by fortune and by God*, that men cannot correct them with their prudence, indeed that they have no remedy at all; and on account of this they might judge that one need not sweat much over things but let oneself be governed by chance. (*Prince*, ch. 25; p. 98)

While this unpredictability of history can be attributed to "fortune" or to "God," in the famous chapter that follows this statement

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Machiavelli speaks only of "fortune": provisionally, we might say that "God" is merely one of the popular names for "fortune" or "chance."

Machiavelli's comparison between fortune and a "river" is well known, but it needs careful reconsideration. Because human events so often seem unpredictable,

> I liken her [fortune] to one of those *violent rivers which, when they become enraged flood the plains, ruin the trees and the buildings, lift earth from this part, drop in another*; each person flees before them, everyone yields to their impetus without being able to hinder them in any regard. (*Prince*, ch. 25; p. 98)

History is thus like the River Arno, which occasionally floods the city of Florence: most of the time tranquil; on rare but overpowering occasions, utterly destructive of human life and well-being.

Sometimes, however, the "river" of fortune can be controlled. Machiavelli goes on:

> And although they [rivers] are like this, *it is not as if men, when times are quiet, could not provide for them with dikes and dams so that when they rise later, either they go by a canal or their impetus is not so wanton nor so damaging*. It happens similarly with fortune, which shows her power where virtue has not been put in order to resist her and therefore turns her impetus where she knows that dams and dikes have not been made to contain her. (*Prince*, ch. 25; pp. 98–99)[26]

If the effects of floods can be controlled by understanding the nature of rivers, then the effects of historical unpredictability or fortune should likewise be limited by understanding human nature.

Although most commentators and readers have stopped their consideration of the analogy at this point, there are good reasons to analyze it more closely. The comparison between fortune and a river brings to mind the plan to channel the river Arno with "dikes and dams" to defeat Pisa that was executed by Florence under Machiavelli's direction in 1503/4. Not only was this ill-fated attempt to control a river part of the "effectual reality" of Machiavelli's

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experience as Second Secretary to the Florentine Republic, but it specifically concerns the extent to which human knowledge (in this case, Leonardo's scientific knowledge as a military architect and expert in hydraulics) can control the historical events (a long and inconclusive war between Florence and Pisa which ultimately did not end until 1509).

A good summary of the events discussed in chapter one is contained in Heydenreich's account of Leonardo's career as a "military architect":

> In the spring of 1503 Leonardo was again in Florence, having given up his post with Cesare Borgia probably during the course of the winter. His native town took him forthwith into its service as military engineer. Florence was then engaged in a troublesome and protracted war with Pisa. . . . In 1503 the Florentine Republic opened a new campaign against Pisa, and here emerged the daring plan to divert the course of the Arno River in order to cut off the Pisans from access to the sea, since from this the besieged town was constantly able to obtain supplies. Historical sources and documents reveal that the forceful project was especially promoted by Machiavelli, the secretary of state for war in the Florentine governing council, and that it won the support of Piero Soderini, the chief official of the Republic of Florence.[27]

While some sources suggest that Leonardo originated or directed the plan, the evidence published by Fachard (reproduced in part in Appendix I) shows that work in the field was directed by an architect named Colombino. Although Leonardo visited the site in July 1503 to assess the feasibility of the plan, it was Machiavelli who was responsible for overseeing its execution.[28] After the canal filled with water and collapsed in October 1504, Machiavelli sought unsuccessfully to persuade the Signoria to continue.[29]

Leonardo's technical expertise on the diversion of the Arno was extensive because years before he had developed in detail another, essentially peaceful plan of a similar kind (see Figure 1.6):

> Leonardo had an abiding interest in changing the course of the Arno—but not to cut Pisa off from the sea. He wanted to create a great waterway to open Florence to the sea and bring agricultural and

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> economic benefits to all Tuscany. The Arno was nonnavigable from Florence to Pisa because of its tortuous bends and sudden variations in level. The idea of diverting a long section of it into a man-made canal dated back more than a century before Leonardo's birth. From about 1490 on, Leonardo made it his own, and drew a number of maps, and studies.[30]

Whatever the extent of communication between Machiavelli and Leonardo during the unsuccessful military project of 1503/4, there can be no question that both men devoted extensive energy to conceptualizing human efforts to channel the Arno for political purposes.[31]

In November 1504, immediately after the abandonment of the scheme to divert the Arno, Leonardo was dispatched—again apparently by Machiavelli—on a mission to Piombino, where he spent six or seven weeks consulting on the military fortifications and port facilities; some of this work also required expertise in the control of water, as is evident from Leonardo's notes taken at the time.[32] Whatever the extent of the friendship between Machiavelli and Leonardo, therefore, the technology of redirecting rivers seems to be a practical interest they shared.

These facts in Machiavelli's political career reinforce the need to look more closely at the comparison between fortune and a river—and the notion of controlling chance with "dikes and dams"—in chapter twenty-five of *The Prince*. Detailed analysis of this famous allegory is rendered all the more necessary because Machiavelli also uses it in a poem "On Fortune":

> As a rapid torrent, swollen to the utmost, destroys whatever its current anywhere reaches,
>
> and adds to one place and lowers another, shifts its banks, shifts its bed and its bottom, and makes the earth tremble where it passes,
>
> so Fortune in her furious onrush many times, now here now there, shifts and reshifts the world's affairs.[33]

In another poem, which Allan Gilbert suggests may have been written around 1509, Machiavelli speaks of "all Italy" as "shattered by a

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strong sea of troubles."[34] Machiavelli clearly thought of human history and fortune as resembling the flow of water—often calm but occasionally erupting into overpowering violence and chaos.

Because chapter twenty-five of *The Prince* seeks to show that prudent leaders can control history, the ultimate failure of the diversion of the Arno might explain why Machiavelli does not mention either the project or Leonardo in *The Prince*.[35] For that very reason, however, Leonardo's theories of nature and technology—and particularly his analysis of the role of floods in human history—may have been profoundly important for Machiavelli. Like Plato's allegory of the Cave, therefore, careful analysis of Machiavelli's comparison between fortune and a river is needed to reveal its meaning.

If the chance events in history can be compared to the natural forces of a flood, can we decode the equivalence of the other terms? Most specifically, what is the human equivalent of the "dikes and dams" that can control flooding rivers? And, if this passage provides one of Machiavelli's central statements of the relationship between human endeavor and inanimate nature, why does he end the same chapter of *The Prince* by comparing fortune with a woman, using a metaphor of rape that seemingly contradicts the analogy between fortune and a river?

Since the "violent river" obviously corresponds to the unforeseen events of human history, the moment at which it is "enraged" would correspond to warfare. Moments of either foreign invasion or civil unrest destroy the plans and tranquillity of individuals. Such eruptions "flood the plains"—that is, they inundate the community with soldiers. Wars "ruin the trees and the buildings"—that is, they destroy both the natural resources and the human constructions on which civilization rests. Invasions "lift earth from this part, drop in another"—that is, some individuals, groups, or states benefit and rise in status and power while others fall. And "each person flees before them, everyone yields to their impetus"—that is, both as individuals and as a community, humans cannot control the effects of violence and war.

In the analogy between fortune and a river, then, the "earth" seems to represent human beings, the "trees" the natural resources, and the

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"buildings" the arts, sciences, and civilizations made by humans. "Water" stands for events, which at flood tide exceed human control; hence, in the last chapter of *The Prince*, foreign invasions of Italy are described as "these *floods* from outside" (ch. 26; p. 105). But "virtue can be put in order to resist" fortune and "turn her impetus": precisely because human nature is malleable, there are excellent or praiseworthy human possibilities that can limit the effects of war and violence. The essential question, then, is how should we interpret the "dikes and dams" that prudent men can use so that the river's waters, "when they rise later, either they go by a canal or their impetus is not so wanton nor so damaging"?

The immediate sequel in the analogy provides the clue.

> And if you consider *Italy*, which is the seat of these variations and that which has given them motion, you will see *a country without dams and without any dike*. If it had been *diked by suitable virtue, like Germany, Spain, and France*, either this flood would not have caused the great variations that it has, or it would not have come here. (*Prince*, ch. 25; p. 99)[36]

Italy has *neither* "dams" nor "dikes"; Germany, Spain, and France have "dikes"—but Machiavelli is silent here on whether they also have fully developed "dams."

The difference between Italy on the one hand and Germany, Spain, and France on the other is thus a key to the provisions that can be made against fortune. Italy, which has repeatedly been invaded and devastated by foreign troops, symbolizes the vulnerability of human societies. Since Germany, Spain, and France have diverse political systems—the Germans are "free," whereas the Spanish and French have monarchies—what they share cannot be a form of government. In chapter three of *The Prince* (p. 8), Machiavelli discusses the French king Louis XII's short-lived conquest of Italy, indicating that he apparently had "the strongest of armies" but could not maintain control because he lost the "support of the inhabitants." Apparently, the "dikes" in the famous analogy of a river are the military forces which permit rulers to conquer and societies to defend themselves from foreign invasion. If so, then the "dams" would be the means by

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which “the inhabitants” are “channeled”: if “dikes” are armies, “dams” seem to be laws.[37]

As is demonstrated by Machiavelli’s other works, the image of the “flood” to describe “fortune” is part of a broader theory of human history. In one of the most important general discussions of history in the *Discourses*, Machiavelli argues that there are recurrent cycles in which “records of times gone by are obliterated by diverse causes, of which some are due to men and some to heaven” (II, 5; p. 288). Whereas the human causes arise “when a new religious institution comes into being” and its “founders” seek to “wipe out” traces of older beliefs and institutions (ibid., pp. 288–289),

> The causes due to heaven are those which wipe out a whole generation and reduce the inhabitants in certain parts of world to but a few. This is brought about *by pestilence or by famine or by a flood and of these the most important is the last*. (Ibid., pp. 289–290)

Like the biblical story of Noah and the flood, Machiavelli’s analogy between fortune and a river is a way of reflecting on what actually happened.

The pattern of these cycles is described in the *Florentine Histories*:

> Usually provinces go most of the time, in the changes they make, from *order to disorder and then pass again from disorder to order, for worldly things are not allowed by nature to stand still*. As soon as they reach their ultimate perfection, having no further to rise, they must descend; and similarly, once they have descended and through their disorders arrived at the ultimate depth, since they cannot descend further, of necessity they must rise. Thus *they are always descending from good to bad and rising from bad to good*. (V, 1; p. 185)

Or, as Machiavelli put it in the *Discourses*, even the natural “floods, pestilences and famines” have a political function,

> when the craftiness and malignity of man has gone as far as it can go, the world must needs be purged in one of these three ways, so that mankind, being reduced to comparatively few and humbled by adversity, may adopt a more appropriate form of life and grow better.

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(*Discourses*, II, 5; p. 290)

Knowledge of these changes makes it possible to form "composite bodies" like "states and religious institutions" that are "better constituted and have a longer life" (*Discourses*, III, 1; p. 385). The analogy between fortune and a river in *The Prince* stands for a deeper theory of history that Machiavelli elaborated more fully in the *Discourses* and the *Florentine Histories*.

Machiavelli's view of the effects of natural catastrophe on history could well have been influenced by discussions with Leonardo, who wrote that floods are—*in actual fact*—the main agency of historical disaster and political change:

> *Amid all the causes of the destruction of human property, it seems to me that rivers hold the foremost place on account of their excessive and violent inundations* . . . against the irreparable inundation caused by swollen and proud rivers no resource of human foresight can avail; for in a succession of raging and seething waves gnawing and tearing away high banks, growing turbid with the earth from ploughed fields, destroying the houses therein and uprooting the tall trees, it carries these as its prey down to the sea which is its lair, *bearing along with it men, trees, animals, houses, and lands, sweeping away every dike and every kind of barrier*, bearing along the light things, and devastating and destroying those of weight, creating big landslips out of small fissures, filling up with floods the low valleys, and rushing headlong with destructive and inexorable mass of waters. (*Notebooks*, ed. I. Richter, 26–27)

Leonardo's view, first drafted in the 1490s, resembles Machiavelli's image of fortune as a river and may also help to explain why, at the end of chapter twenty-five, Machiavelli provides an apparently contradictory analogy by saying that "fortune is a woman" (p. 101).

After Machiavelli's description of the need to build "dikes and dams" to channel the river of fortune "when times are quiet," it should strike the reader as puzzling that Machiavelli should use the image of a rape to symbolize the control of fortune.

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> I judge this indeed, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, *because fortune is a woman*; and it is necessary, *if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down*. (*Prince*, ch. 25; p. 101)

It should be obvious that, if fortune is like a river, it cannot be treated like a woman: beating and striking the flooding waters won't keep the rising river within its banks. As Leonardo puts it in his *Notebooks*,

> That a river which is to be turned from one place to another *must be coaxed and not treated roughly or with violence*; and to do this a sort of dam should be built into the river, and then lower down another one projecting farther and in like manner a third, fourth, and fifth so that the river may discharge itself into the channel allotted to it, or by this means it may be diverted from the place it has damaged as was done in Flanders according to what I was told by Niccolò di Forzore. (*Notebooks*, ed. I. Richter, 351–352)

The two metaphors for history—a river and a woman—seem flatly in contradiction.[38]

The paradox can be resolved if the image of raping "fortune" is considered as a description of the violent actions by the individual leader which are needed at the foundation of "new laws and new arms."[39] As Machiavelli emphasizes when discussing the great founders in chapter six of *The Prince*:

> *the nature of peoples is variable*, and it is *easy to persuade them* of something, but *difficult to keep them in that persuasion*. And thus things must be ordered in such a mode that when they no longer believe, one can make them believe by force. Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus would not have been able to make their peoples observe their constitutions for long if they had been unarmed, as happened in our times to Brother Girolamo Savonarola. (p. 24)

Machiavelli might have added that the same thing had happened to him personally, when the proposed canal to divert the Arno was abandoned as soon as the Florentine Signoria could no longer be persuaded that the plan would ultimately work.[40] Science or

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technology without political prudence is useless, and without the political will to use force on occasion, cautious attempts to rechannel events will ultimately fail.

For Machiavelli, what is often called the relationship between "man and nature" is ultimately political. Without control over human nature, all control over inanimate nature can be lost.[41] The "state" (*lo stato*) is the arena of stability which humans, with art, can construct as a defense against the natural changeability of circumstances.[42] In another of the best-known lines of *The Prince* (ch. 7, p. 48), Machiavelli asserts that "the principal foundations all states have, new ones as well as old or mixed, are *good laws and good arms*." It is from the combination of control over foreign invasion and domestic unrest that stability arises. "Dikes" (good armies) protect a society against the flood of foreign invaders; "dams" (good laws) channel the passions of the society's own citizens.

Most readers of *The Prince* have, of course, stressed the sentence of chapter twelve immediately following the statement that "good laws and good arms" are the "principal foundations" of all states:

> And because there cannot be good laws where there are not good arms, and where there are good arms there must be good laws, I shall leave out the reasoning on laws and shall speak of arms. (p. 48)

The logic of this disingenuous phrase needs attention. There "cannot be good laws where there are not good arms": military force is a necessary condition of civil peace. "All the armed prophets conquered and the unarmed ones were ruined" (*Prince*, ch. 6; p. 24). But this necessary condition is not necessary *and sufficient*: it is "armed *prophets*" who conquer, not all those—including King Louis XII of France—who merely have "the strongest of armies."[43]

If good armies are necessary but not sufficient conditions of a stable state, what is the role of the laws, symbolized by the "dams" of the allegory of the river? Machiavelli's phrase is tantalizing: "*where there are good arms there must be good laws*." The Italian has the sense of "there ought to be" or "there should be": one expects good laws to exist in a community with good armies—but this expectation may not always be fulfilled. Good laws are sufficient for good

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armies, but they are not necessary for them. In other words, communities with good laws all have good armies, but some good armies exist in societies without good laws. France and Spain have "dikes"—the "strongest of armies"—yet they do not have "dams."

This interpretation of the phrase "where there are good arms there must be good laws" is confirmed at the outset of the book Machiavelli devotes to "good arms." In the Preface to *The Art of War*, Machiavelli stresses the need for a citizen army in which the "civilian life and the military life" are "closely united," as they were under the "ancient ways" of pagan political virtue. Hence, the principal reason why the ancient military virtues have not been recovered in the centuries following the corruption and fall of Rome is "that our way of living today, as a result of the Christian religion, does not impose the same necessity for defending ourselves as antiquity did."[44]

Machiavelli elsewhere confirms the need to go beyond the purely military preconditions of political stability. In *Florentine Histories*, he emphasizes that consideration of military conflict and war without an understanding of domestic politics makes it impossible to understand human events. The histories of Florence written by d'Arezzo and Poggio explained "everything in detail" about the "wars waged by the Florentines with foreign princes and peoples," but "as regards civil discords and internal enmities, and the effects arising from them, they were altogether silent about the one and so brief about the other as to be of no use to readers or pleasure to anyone" (*Florentine Histories*, Pref.; p. 6). This matters because:

> *if no other lesson is useful to the citizens who govern republics*, it is that which shows *the causes of the hatreds and divisions in the city*, so that when they become wise through the dangers of others, they may be able to maintain themselves united. (Ibid.)

Domestic affairs ("civil discords and internal enmities") are sources of violence and unpredictability—indeed, they can lead to foreign invasion, as in the discontents that led Italians to invite Louis XII to invade them the first time (*Prince*, ch. 3; p. 8).

The control over unforeseen events thus requires both good laws and good arms. Indeed, while Machiavelli does not discuss good laws

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in chapter twelve of *The Prince* ("I shall leave out the reasoning on laws and shall speak of arms"), he includes both when he directly addresses potential rulers in chapter eighteen:

> Thus you must know that there are *two kinds of combat: one with laws, the other with force*. The first is proper to man, the second to beasts . . . a prince needs to know how to use both natures; and *the one without the other is not lasting*. (p. 69)[45]

The specifically human constraint on selfishness is the law. While law is not sufficient by itself, for the reason that "all unarmed prophets fail," force also has only limited efficacy (though to be sure the limitations of brute force differ from those concerning laws).[46]

The "state," then, is that domain of stability in the sea of chaos produced by the variations in human passion and natural events. The land, however, only remains dry insofar as human action has produced the "dikes and dams"—the armies and the laws—which constrain ambition and selfishness both within and outside the community. Human societies are what Machiavelli calls "compound" or unnatural bodies, created by human art or convention. But this creation cannot be the product of collective deliberation, since collective deliberation presupposes the existence of accepted rules. Hence, as Machiavelli puts it in the *Discourses*:

> One should take it as a general rule that rarely, if ever, does it happen that a state, whether it be a republic or a kingdom, is either well-ordered at the outset or radically transformed *vis-à-vis* its old institutions *unless this be done by one person*. (*Discourses*, I, 9; p. 132)

Because it is possible to be "a prince in a republic" (e.g., *Discourses*, I, 10; p. 136), the same prudential rules are appropriate for "rulers of a republic or of a kingdom" (ibid., I, 12; p. 143; I, 16; p. 155; I, 25; p. 176, *et passim*). An individual with such "sole authority" (ibid., p. 134) or "founder" (ibid., I, 10; pp. 134–135) is, in *The Prince*, discussed in the context of "altogether new principalities, where there is a new prince" (ch. 6; p. 32).

The highest examples of leadership discussed in *The Prince* thus

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concern the individual leader whose actions form a community, providing a domain of respite against the chaos and uncertainty of the "human condition." Since new principalities "are acquired either with the arms of others or with one's own, either by fortune or by virtue" (ch. 1; p. 6), there are two principal situations in which it is possible for an individual to create an "entirely new" state:

> And because the result of becoming prince from private individual presupposes either virtue [*virtù*] or fortune, it appears that one or the other of these two things relieves in part many difficulties; nonetheless, he who has relied less on fortune has maintained himself more. (*Prince*, ch. 6; p. 22)

Dependence on "fortune" or chance apparently means that a leader has benefited from the good luck that his natural inclination or choice of action has coincided with the external circumstances. What, then, does Machiavelli mean by *virtù*, that most difficult of terms in his lexicon?

For ancient Greek philosophers in the Socratic tradition, one form of virtue (*arete*) was human excellence in a moral and political sense. Many modern translators, accustomed to the Christian understanding of "virtue," have difficulty applying the same connotations to Machiavelli's use of the word: hence some render his use of *virtù* by "ingenuity" or "cleverness" as well as "virtue." While I will return to this issue below, it should be evident that Machiavelli views human virtue as associated with the ability to control fortune. For example, if fortune "had been diked by suitable virtue," war would not have had as serious effect in Italy—or, indeed, might not have occurred there at all (*Prince*, ch. 25; p. 99). The two principal types of "new princes" are those who rise to power through "virtue and their own arms" (*Prince*, ch. 6) or through "fortune and the arms of others" (*Prince*, ch. 7). Virtue, then, concerns the ability of human prudence, will, and action to control the effects of human nature and history.

Machiavelli writes as if "virtue" and "fortune" were two distinct attributes, parallel to having "one's own arms" or "the arms of others." But Machiavelli's *virtù* is not a trait an individual can possess, like courage, intelligence, or moderation. Because virtue

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represents the control over fortune, not only is the definition of the former merely the absence of the latter, but the circumstance supposedly defining the *means* of gaining power is only known by the historical *results*: "in the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no court to appeal to, *one looks to the end" (Prince*, ch. 18; p. 71). The temptation to read "end" (*fine*) here as goal or intention should be resisted in the light of the next sentence: "So let a prince win and maintain his state: the means will always be judged honorable, and will be praised by everyone" (ibid.). "It is a sound maxim that reprehensible actions may be justified by their effects, and that *when the effect is good*, as it was in the case of Romulus [who killed his brother], *it always justifies the action" (Discourses*, I, 9; p. 132). Not only do the "ends justify the means"; the end or results virtually *define* the means.

III. The "Example" of Cesare Borgia

To understand this point, it is well to follow Rousseau's advice and consider more precisely the possibility that Machiavelli's "choice of his execrable hero"—Cesare Borgia—"is in itself enough to make manifest his hidden intention."[47] In chapter seven of *The Prince* (pp. 25ff), Machiavelli discusses "New Principalities That Are Acquired by Others' Arms and Fortune." He uses as his principal example "Cesare Borgia, called Duke Valentino by the vulgar," adding "I do not know what better teaching I could give to a new prince than the example of his actions" (*Prince*, ch. 7; pp. 26–27).

Chapter six makes clear that the highest and most praiseworthy princes gain power through virtue and their own arms, as did Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus. As a result, Cesare would seem to be the highest exemplar of the wrong kind of prince. From the structure of the argument, therefore, one might presume that his "example" will indicate something to avoid, not something to be imitated. At first, however, this seems not to be the case:

> Cesare Borgia, called Duke Valentino by the vulgar, acquired his state through the fortune of his father [Pope Alexander VI] and lost it through the same, notwithstanding the fact that he made use of every deed and

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> did all those things that should be done by a prudent and virtuous man to put his roots in the states that the arms and fortune of others had given him. (Ibid., pp. 26–27)

After cataloguing Cesare's deeds, Machiavelli adds that "the duke had laid very good foundations for his power" (ibid., p. 29) and "he would soon have succeeded, if Alexander had lived" (ibid., p. 30).

As we first read chapter seven, it appears that Cesare failed because of events he could not have foreseen or prevented.

> But if at the death of Alexander the duke had been healthy, everything would have been easy for him. And he told me, on the day that Julius II was created, that *he had thought about what might happen when his father was dying, and had found a remedy for everything, except that he never thought that at his death he himself would also be on the point of dying*. (Ibid., p. 32)

Bad luck—fortune, in Machiavelli's terms—cannot always be controlled. Cesare's failure "was not his fault" (ibid., p. 27), or so it would seem.

In the next and last paragraph of the chapter, Machiavelli seemingly reinforces the view that Cesare could not have done otherwise and is thus a model to follow:

> Thus, if I summed up all the actions of the duke, *I would not know how to reproach him*; on the contrary, it seems to me he should be put forward, as I have done, to be imitated by all those who have *risen to empire through fortune and by the arms of others*. (Ibid.)

The astute reader needs to remember, here, that Cesare is called "the duke" (the term of address used "by the vulgar"—ibid., p. 27); that he rose "to empire" (that is to power not based on popular support or republican ideals); and above all that he is an example of coming to power "through fortune and by the arms of others" (modes that contrast, unfavorably, with those of the founders described in chapter six).

Only with these things in mind is one prepared for the end of the

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chapter, for having just said "*I would not know* how to reproach" Cesare, Machiavelli concludes:

> *One* could only indict him *in the creation* of Julius as pontiff, in which *he made a bad choice*; for, as was said, though he could not make a pope to suit himself, he could have kept anyone from being pope. (Ibid., p. 33)

And, after explaining in detail why Cesare should have blocked the election of Julius II,[48] Machiavelli concludes:

> *So the duke erred in this choice and it was the cause of his ultimate ruin.*

The assertion is flat and uncompromising: Cesare made a mistake in "this choice," and that mistake—not fortune beyond human control—"was the cause of his ultimate ruin."[49] After all, Machiavelli does "know" something about the reasons for Cesare's failure.[50]

One is thus encouraged to go back to the earlier statement that led the reader to believe that Cesare had no way of avoiding the election of Julius II. Machiavelli tells us that "he told me"—the evidence is first hand[51]—that he "had found a remedy for everything" that might happen when his father was dying, "except that he never thought that at his death he himself would also be on the point of dying." In other words, Cesare was either relying on his own last-minute intervention during the conclave to elect a successor to Alexander VI or had concluded that Giuliano delle Rovere, the future Julius II, need not be blocked. Either way, Cesare is twice described by Machiavelli has having made a "choice" and, by not preventing the election of an Italian "whom he had offended," Cesare caused his own defeat.[52]

This interpretation is confirmed by Machiavelli's diplomatic dispatches at the time of these events. If the comparison of fortune and a river in chapter twenty-five of *The Prince* is illuminated by Machiavelli's experience of attempting to divert the Arno in 1504, the analysis of Cesare in chapter seven is also a reflection of events Machiavelli witnessed first hand. For example, on 23 October 1503 (before the election of Julius II), Machiavelli wrote his superiors in

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Florence that "the government of this Lord [Cesare] since I have been here has rested only on his good fortune."[53] On 30 October, just before the conclave to elect a new pope, "the belief that it must be San Piero in Vincola [the future Julius II] has so much increased that there are those who give odds of sixty to a hundred on him."[54] Finally, on 4 November 1503, after the election of Julius II, Machiavelli reports the judgment of some "prudent" observers that:

> this Pontiff, having for his election had need of the Duke, to whom he made big promises, can do nothing else than keep him expectant in this way; yet they fear, if the Duke does not adopt some other plan than remaining in Rome, that he will be deceived, because they know the natural hatred which His Holiness has always had for him; the Pope cannot so soon have forgotten the exile in which he spent ten years. Yet *the Duke lets himself be carried away by that rash confidence of his*.[55]

In fact, Cesare did stay in Rome—and Julius did trick him, effectively putting him under arrest and taking control of his cities and troops. Cesare's failure was his own fault.[56]

To appreciate fully the importance of this evidence, we need to consider several additional points:

- The "fortune" that brought Cesare to power was the ambition of his father, Pope Alexander VI. Later Machiavelli describes Cesare as merely the "instrument" of his father; indeed, it was Alexander who "did all the things I discussed above in the actions of the duke" (*Prince*, ch. 11; p. 46).
- In this circumstance, the question of who controlled the papacy should have been the primary concern for Cesare; as Machiavelli puts it, "the duke, *before everything else*" should have secured a Spanish or French pope. If the goal was the creation of a large central Italian state based on the papacy, rivalry with other Italians and considerations of the balance of power should have made this choice perfectly obvious.
- Even if ill, Cesare could have vetoed Julius II had this been a clearly determined policy: "though he was half-alive, he remained secure . . . if he could not make pope whomever he

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wanted, at least it would not be someone he did not want" (*Prince*, ch. 7; p. 32). Having always been dependent on his father—the "fortune" that brought him to power—Cesare did not know enough to have made the correct choice.

- Cesare Borgia was in the same situation as Lorenzo de' Medici: *The Prince* is dedicated to a close relative of the pope (nephew rather than son, to be sure), and it was the pope (Leo X, Giovanni de' Medici) who had designs to use Lorenzo (and before him, Giuliano de' Medici) to establish a large central Italian state. Machiavelli underscores this parallel by explicitly connecting Leo X to the tradition of Alexander VI (*Prince*, ch. 11; pp. 46–47).

Insofar as there is an irony in the dedication to Lorenzo (as has been argued above), the apparent praise of Cesare takes on a new tone. If we read *The Prince* as "a book of republicans" (to use Rousseau's phrase), the Medici leaders in Florence are "new princes" like Cesare Borgia, not founders in the true sense who can claim to establish a lasting regime.[57] And if this is possible, Machiavelli could be highly ironic when he says "*I do not know what better teaching I could give to a new prince than the example of his actions*" (ch. 7, p. 27). Cesare is indeed an outstanding example of something the new prince should *avoid*.

This interpretation of the text is confirmed by another historical detail that seems to have escaped most modern commentators. Machiavelli quotes Cesare as saying that "he never thought that at his [father's] death *he himself would also be on the point of dying" (Prince*, ch. 7; p. 32). It was reasonable that Cesare did not expect to be "dying" when his father died in August 1503, since he was only twenty-six at the time. But Cesare actually did not die until 1507. Cesare seems to have exaggerated the cause of his own failure—as ambitious men often do—when he told Machiavelli he was so sick that he was "*on the point of dying*."[58]

Cesare's singular "bad luck"—the cause of Alexander's death—was widely rumored in Rome in 1503: after describing the poison used by the Borgias to kill many rivals ("a white powder of an agreeable taste . . . which did not work on the spot, but slowly and

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gradually"), Burckhardt adds that "at the end of their career father and son poisoned themselves with the same powder by accidentally tasting a sweetmeat intended for a wealthy cardinal."[59] Whether true or not, such a rumor would have been known not only to Machiavelli, but to the Medici and other informed contemporaries. In this light, Cesare's remark that "*he never thought that at his* [Alexander's] *death he himself would also be on the point of dying*" takes on particular irony.

Why then the praise of Cesare's "virtue"? The "example" of Cesare Borgia in chapter seven is complex. The specific deeds of Duke Valentino, which had generated his reputation as a totally unscrupulous and violent man, are not at issue for Machiavelli. The "spirit" and boldness to use force as a means to create a new regime are identical to the actions of the praiseworthy founders described in chapter six; without such actions, it is impossible to conquer fortune. While in this sense Borgia's actions illustrate political virtue, it is the *absence* of the correlative goal of establishing "good laws" which seems to be associated with the defect of Borgia's procedure. Borgia illustrates the problem of treating fortune as a woman without also building "dikes and dams" against the flood.

To be an "entirely new prince," Cesare Borgia would have had to come to power with his "own arms" and with "virtue." Why does Machiavelli characterize Cesare, who might be considered a leader seeking to create his own armies, among those who relied on "the arms of others"? Like Romulus, who killed his own brother in order to found Rome, did Cesare need to plan his father's murder in order to ensure that the papacy was entirely under his control? Only in this case could Cesare have controlled the timing of Pope Alexander's death and avoided the unexpected coincidence of his father's death and his own illness, of which Machiavelli says Cesare complained.[60]

According to this interpretation, the defect of Borgia might be attributed to a lack of understanding of politics and his failure to establish an "entirely new principality." These faults reflect, in turn, Cesare's dependence on his father and his failure to combine "good laws" (the form of "combat" that is "proper to man") with the use of force (which is natural to "beasts"). As Burckhardt describes the events in 1503, "Cesare isolated his father, murdering brother,

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brother-in-law, and other relations and courtiers whenever their favour with the Pope or their position in any other respect became inconvenient to him"; as a result, Alexander VI is said to have "lived in hourly dread of Cesare."[61] Moreover, a contemporary reported that Alexander VI told the Venetian ambassador that he planned to have Cesare succeed him as pope: "I will see to it," Alexander is reputed to have said, "that one day the Papacy shall belong either to him or to you [the Venetian ambassador]." Is Machiavelli's praise of Cesare due to Duke Valentino's secret goal of killing his father and becoming pope himself, with the aim of secularizing the states controlled by the Church and annihilating the papacy? If so, Machiavelli's subtle criticism of Cesare might concern the way the plan was bungled.[62]

The true founders, deserving of the highest praise, combine both force and law. Moses, Romulus, Cyrus, and Theseus were all willing to kill or deceive if need be, but the result was a lasting regime. Only such leaders are "great men" who provide the "*greatest examples" (Prince*, ch. 6; p. 22). Such founders, like "armed prophets," not only "remain powerful, secure, honored, and prosperous," but they are "*held in veneration*" (ibid., pp. 24–25). The discussion of Cesare Borgia in chapter seven can only be understood in the context of the praise of Moses, Romulus, Cyrus, and Theseus in the preceding chapter—and Cesare's failure to succeed in creating a new order equivalent to the Mosaic Law or the Roman republic.

There is a crucial difference between those who combine force and law (and hence whose success can be attributed to "virtue") and those who, like Cesare, use only force (and, when they fail, blame "fortune"). To underline this contrast, Machiavelli's next chapter is "Of Those Who Have Attained a Principality Through Crimes" (*Prince*, ch. 8; pp. 34–38). Here, he focuses on the career of Agathocles the Sicilian, who "became king of Syracuse not only from private fortune but from a mean and abject one" by means of "a life of crime at every rank of his career" (p. 34).

After cataloguing the crimes of Agathocles, which included having "all the senators and the richest of the people killed by his soldiers," Machiavelli notes that he "held the principate of that city without any civil controversy" (pp. 34–35). Since Moses, Romulus, Cyrus, and

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Theseus were classified as having come to power by "virtue," whereas Cesare is described as depending on "fortune," we might wonder whether Agathocles will be classified along with those described in chapter six or in chapter seven. Instead, Machiavelli claims that "one cannot attribute to fortune or to virtue what he [Agathocles] achieved without either" (p. 35).

The apparent puzzlement arises because different criteria are involved in using the terms "fortune" and "virtue." On the one hand, "whoever might consider the actions and virtue of this man will see nothing or little that can be attributed to fortune": Agathocles was not like Cesare Borgia because, "after infinite betrayals and cruelties" he still "could live for a long time secure in his fatherland, defend himself against external enemies, and never be conspired against by his citizens" (p. 37). But Agathocles cannot be classified along with Moses, Romulus, Cyrus, and Theseus either: "one cannot call it virtue to kill one's citizens, betray one's friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; these modes can enable one to acquire empire, but not glory" (p. 35).

If Machiavelli were as "Machiavellian" as is often proclaimed, why should this be? Later, we are told that Agathocles was successful because his cruelties were "*well used*"; such praiseworthy acts of violence are "done at a stroke, out of the necessity to secure oneself, and then are not persisted in" (pp. 37–38). One is reminded of the description of Moses when, coming down Mount Sinai with the Tables of the Law for the first time, he confronted the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf. Hence, as Machiavelli says, "if one considers *the virtue of Agathocles* . . . and the greatness of his spirit . . . one does not see why he has to be judged inferior to any *most excellent captain*" (p. 35).[63]

The key seems to be how we describe the actions of a leader after the fact and in light of the consequences: "one cannot *call it virtue* to kill one's citizens, betray one's friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion." These deeds may be—and typically are—necessary at the founding of "new modes and orders." But such *deeds themselves* cannot be *called* virtue. Indeed, when Machiavelli refers to them in discussing "the greatest examples" (like Moses), he uses indirect language: "And thus things must be ordered in such a mode

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that *when they no longer believe one can make them believe by force" (Prince*, ch. 6; p. 24).

Agathocles' cruelty is called both "well committed" (because it was done effectively) and "savage" (because it was not done toward the end of producing good and lasting laws). As a "most excellent captain," Agathocles—like Hiero of Syracuse (*Prince*, ch. 6; p. 25) or Francesco Sforza of Milan (ch. 7; pp. 26–27) and unlike Cesare or Liveretto da Fermo (ch. 8; pp. 35–36)—was successful, finding "some remedy for their state with God and with men" (p. 38). But his deeds "do not *allow him to be celebrated among the most excellent men*"—like Moses, Romulus, Cyrus, or Theseus—because, unlike them and like Cesare or Liveretto, he did not found a lasting regime.[64]

That this is the essential criterion for judging founders is made explicit in the *Discourses*:

> the security of a republic or of a kingdom, therefore, does not depend upon its ruler governing it prudently during his lifetime, but upon *his so ordering it that, after his death, it may maintain itself in being*. (*Discourses*, I, 11; p. 142)

Indeed, the explicit criticism of Christianity lies in just such a failure:

> If such a religious spirit [as that of the pagan Romans] had been kept up by the ruler of the Christian commonwealth as was ordained for us by its founder, Christian states and republics would have been much more united and much more happy than they are. (*Discourses*, I, 12; p. 144)[65]

The outcomes or results of a leader's actions—not his goals or aims—are the only reasonable criterion for judging him.

IV. Standards of Praise and Blame

The comparison between the leaders or princes described in chapters six through eight of *The Prince* will confound the reader who seeks to use language in a conventional manner. Machiavelli describes as "virtue" the "means" used by Moses or Romulus because the

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